

Ahmad Al-Buni and His Esoteric Model

M. Kubilay Akman and Donna M. Brown

“Magic can be briefly described as the art of influencing the course of events by the occult control of natural phenomena through the application of ritual observances acquired through a study of esoteric and often closely guarded corpus of knowledge and traditions, oral and written, supposedly achieving results not obtainable through ordinary means.”^{1,2}

Abstract

This article investigates the Islamic esoteric/occult model of the controversial North African Sufi, Abu’l Abbas Ahmad ibn Ali ibn Yusuf al-Buni, whose works are widely viewed in the Muslim world as a part of an unorthodox, occult practice. The article begins with a discussion of the Islamic view regarding occultism and the various mainstream schools that are critical of these practices. Magic and its influence in the ancient and modern world are also discussed along with natural magic’s compelling role in the development of modern science. In addition to touching upon Al-Buni’s life and his primary works, this article examines Al-Buni’s esoteric and magical practices from both an esoteric and a sociological perspective. Its primary focus is on a series of charms or talismans created by Al-Buni to exercise control over the seemingly uncontrollable events in life and the environment.

Overview: Islamic Esotericism

Ahmad Al-Buni was a mysterious Sufi master who lived in Egypt in the 13th century. More will be said about him shortly, but first we need to examine the Islamic esoteric and supernatural practices that formed the context in which he worked. These practices form part of what is called *‘ulūm al-ghayb* or the “esoteric (inner) and/or occult (hidden) sciences,”³ which have been commonplace in all Muslim countries and at every level of society throughout history. The Islamic esoteric and occult sciences include “divination, astrology, dream interpretation or oneiromancy,” and those practices that deal with “the properties of the divine names, the magic of numbers and letters, spells, sympathetic magic, sorcery,

amulets, talismans and charms, and the properties of medicinal plants.”⁴ There are, however, three main distinctions with respect to the Islamic occult sciences. They are:

- 1) *ilm al-sihr* (demonic/black magic)
- 2) *‘ilm al-khawāṣṣ wa-al-ṭalāsīm* (theurgy)
- 3) *ilm al-ḥiyal wa-al-sha’wadhah* (white or natural magic)⁵

The Renaissance philosopher, Pico della Mirandola, upheld these three basic distinctions. Mirandola tied the three types of magic—natural, celestial/mathematical, and ceremonial/religious—to the three worlds, i.e., the sublunary, celestial, and supersensible worlds respectively.⁶ Other occult philosopher’s held similar views.

Sihr, the first type of Islamic occult knowledge or science, involves the invocation of infernal and sublunary force, and is strictly condemned

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by *Sharia* scholars and Islamic law. While its study is permitted, its practice is *ha'ram* or forbidden. Practices that invoke the angels and celestial beings, and those that draw upon the knowledge of the beautiful Names of Allāh (*asmā'u llāhi l-ḥusnā*), and passages from Qur'an are permitted, although they are largely hidden from the uninitiated. Such practices fall under the category of theurgy or more aptly, "Qur'anic theurgy,"⁷ which involves supplication and contemplation based on the "Science of Letters" (*Ilm al-ḥurūf*) and their relationship to the ninety-nine Names of God, which reflect His attributes or qualities.⁸ Included are the subsidiary sciences of astronomy, astrology, alchemy and geomancy. These subsidiary practices are also employed in white or natural magic as well as black magic or *sihr*.

Qur'anic "theurgy" or "God working" requires both knowledge and spiritual exertion. For example, *Ilm al-ḥurūf*, or the Science of Letters, and *al-jafra*, a form of gematria based divination, are among the most mystical and secret sciences. Their practice requires a methodological approach, and more than a passing mathematical and astronomical/astrological knowledge.⁹ Qur'anic theurgy, as the name implies, also entails a deep, allegorical interpretation or exegesis of the Qur'an and various other pertinent writings.

Ilm al-ḥiyal wa-al-sha'wadhah or natural magic involves "natural" phenomena in general with no malevolent or irreligious intent. It is based on the elemental force suffusing or inherent in any natural process. Its production is said to remain a secret that is only disclosed to practitioners.

Most other occult and magical technologies, such as the creation and use of talismans, amulets, magic charms and spells, also require the assistance of an expert skilled in the occult sciences. All these aforementioned technologies might fall into any of the three categories listed above. Charms, amulets and spells might be classified as white or black magic depending on the techniques used and their purpose, although drawing clear lines between categories can be difficult. Talismans, on the other hand, are usually employed in white or natural

magic and in theurgic practice. An example of the latter can be seen in the case of talismatic scrolls. "Inscribed with multiple prayers and supplications to God,"¹⁰ and based on Islamic letter magic, verses from the Qur'an and the various Names of God,¹¹ talismatic scrolls were used almost exclusively as tools of devotion in an effort to bring one closer to God or Allāh.

Abu'l Abbas Ahmad ibn Ali ibn Yusuf al-Buni

Very little is known about the mysterious Ahmad Al-Buni. He was supposedly born in Annaba, Algeria, Bune County (Constantine), lived in Egypt and died in Cairo in 1225 CE during the Golden Age of Islam.¹² Al-Buni was a contemporary of Ibn-Arabi, and some scholars believe that they shared at least one spiritual teacher—the Tunisian Master 'Abd-al-*aziz al-Mandawi*¹³—among the many eminent Sufi teachers of the time. He was influenced by Plato, Aristotle, Hermes, and various Chaldean magicians and refers to them in his written works. Indeed, there are a number of equivalencies between Neoplatonic philosophy and Al-Buni's work. Although Al-Buni was a Sufi Sheikh in the Sunni tradition, he is believed to have been influenced by certain Shi'a movements that made use of magic letters and talismans.¹⁴

Al-Buni's corpus has been among the main sources of occultism, magic and "secret knowledge" in Muslim societies, with his more than 40 works. In addition to his *Shams Al-Ma'arif*, another mysterious text—*Luma'at al-nuraniyya* (Brilliant Lights)—investigates the occult properties of the ninety-nine Names of God and advised the faithful on how they could harness their supernatural power through amulets and talismans. These are just two of the many highly colored texts illustrated with tables and diagrams guiding the reader toward supernatural and divine succor. Another manuscript of interest is Al-Buni's *Sharhu-al-Barhatiyah*, "consisting of a set of 24 names from the Arabic alphabet that correspond to the lunar mansions. The names, which are used for summoning or conjuration, are said to date

to Enoch before being used by King Solomon.”¹⁵

His major works, particularly *Shams Al-Ma'arif* (The Book of the Sun of Gnosis, a 13th c. grimoire), elements of which will be examined here, have been among the most widely read and most influential sources for occult activities based on the secret symbology of geometry, numbers and letters. This work has been likened to *The Three Books of Occult Philosophy*, by Henry Cornelius Agrippa—one of the most important sources for magic and ritual in the Western world.

The current form of Al-Buni's book consists of two volumes; *Shams al-Ma'arif al-Anmat* and *Shams al-Ma'arif al-Sughra*. The book begins with several chapters that introduce the reader to talismans, magic squares and prayers for protection. Included is an all-important section on “number science,” consisting of combinations of numbers and letters that are believed to impart wisdom and spiritual development, and which create a magical effect. According to Al-Buni, these occult sciences are the only way to communicate with angels (*Malā'ikah*), genies (*Djinn* or *Jinn*), and spirits.

Authorities differ as to the magical secret behind the activity of the letters and numbers. Some thought that 28 letters had an inherent temper and were categorized based on the four elements of fire, air, water, earth, or the qualities by which the *materia prima* manifests itself. The four elements have another significance in terms of their four “natures,” hot, cold, humid and dry, which correspond to the states of the soul. Others thought that the secret of the letters resided in their numerical proportion or their relationship to the 28 mansions of the moon. But more importantly, the science of letters is to be considered triply for their: 1) sonoral symbolism; 2) graphic or hieroglyphic symbolism; 3) arithmologic or numerical symbolism or value.¹⁶ Al-Buni seems to have accepted all of the above in addition to believing that the number and letter science could be commingled with the power of the stars based on their inherent qualities and propitious position in the sky.

Although Al-Buni's corpus focuses on the entire range of occult sciences, such as his complex letterist cosmology, or the “beautiful Names of God” and their magical and numerical properties in the creation of his complicated and abstruse magic squares and diagrams of the invisible worlds, this article will explore his “science of charms,” which is especially evident in Folk Islam but not by any means limited to popular beliefs and practices. But before moving on to this discussion, one may well ask if these ancient texts have any relevance and efficacy in today's world? We shall look at them from a sociological perspective, and not only from the perspective of esoteric studies, religion, psychology and history.

Magic and Its influence on the Ancient and Modern World

Regardless of cultural context and civilization, human beings have always needed to exercise control over the seemingly uncontrollable events in their life and environment. Magic, occultism, and related practices of intellectual and practical endeavor have found a suitable basis to develop in this sociological environment. Such practices are rooted in the belief that there exists a hidden reality of energies and forces affecting everyday life that are concealed behind the world of form and outer appearances. Furthermore, the lines between the manifest and invisible world were thought to be permeable. The world, according to this view, was animated with Life. “The structure of this world view,” according to the noted Sociologist, Dr. Edward Tiryakian, in his *On the Margin of the Visible: Sociology, the Esoteric, and the Occult*, can be likened “to the scientist who regards the dynamics of his world view in terms of impersonal forces.”¹⁷

For Sir James Frazier, magic was also akin to science in that it is based on man's confidence that he can dominate nature directly if he understands the Laws that magically govern it.¹⁸ His views were consistent in this one respect with the Theosophist, Helena Blavatsky, who viewed Magic “as the exercise of natural powers,” but whose powers were Superior to the usual functions of nature. “A miracle,” writes Blavatsky,

is not a violation of the laws of Nature, except for ignorant people. Magic is but a science, a profound knowledge of the Occult forces in Nature, and of the laws governing the visible or the invisible world. Spiritualism in the hands of an adept becomes Magic, for he is learned in the art of blending together the laws of the Universe, without breaking any of them and thereby violating Nature.¹⁹

Tiryakian, writes Thomas Kearny in a summary of Dr. Tiryakian's aforementioned book, insists that rather than regarding

the esoteric and occult as vestiges of an earlier, less sophisticated mentality, the rationale behind this volume is to regard them as an ever present, though usually much less visible, antithetical complement to mainstream Western culture. This "counterculture" has been a perennial seedbed of innovations and inspirations in religion, science, politics, and other domains (such as art and literature),²⁰ medicine and psychology.

Thus, spiritualism, magic and the occult prepared the ground for development in many fields. An endless stream of great thinkers, historians and philosophers such as Plutarch, Pythagoras, Plato and Iamblichus were involved in esoteric practices. Many of the key thinkers and "heroes of the Renaissance and the 'Scientific Revolution,' from Bruno to Pico to Newton"²¹ have been "shown to be profoundly occultist in orientation and methodology—and profoundly dependent on Arabic sources."²² One may point to the influence of the Islamic theologian and logician Averroes, to Ibn Sina (Avicenna), the astronomer, thinker and physician, or Moschopoulus, a Byzantine scholar who drew on Al-Buni's works in his pure mathematical treatise on the subject of magic squares, to name only a few.

Occultism was also responsible for the Renaissance view of the "Dignity" and "Divine power in man." Since man, created in the image of God and gifted with reason and the power of choice, stands between heavenly and infernal realms, he can free himself from the limitations of nature and fashion for himself the

thing he prefers. Thus, the exercise of magical powers, at least in certain periods and places, was and continued to be thought of as an expression of man's role as mediator between the terrestrial world and the supermundane.²³

Al-Buni: Sufi Sage or Magician?

So how does one define the position of Abu'l Abbas Ahmad ibn Ali ibn Yusuf al-Buni in Islamic history? Is he a legitimate Sufi or clandestine magician or a combination of both? The answer, we may say, lies in one's point of view. *Hikma* or wisdom, and mathematics, as well as letter magic, involving the Names of God, was Al-Buni's primary focus. Yet his *Sharhu-al-Barhatiyah* or *Berhatiah*, although it too employed letter magic, is primarily a book of power and conjuration. It serves as a guidebook for summoning the "Djinn" or "Jinn" (spirits of fire and air that can be beneficent, neutral or evil), as well as for the practice of "Red Magic," which engages the planet Mars and usually deals with matters of love and sex. Saturn is prominent in Al-Buni's *Berhatiah* and in Islamic magic in general.²⁴ This planet is involved in matters having to do with concerns about creation, justice, time, power, protection and death. It should be noted here that Al-Buni viewed the planets, the lunar mansions and the signs of the zodiac as spiritual beings and essential players in occult workings.²⁵

Many of Al-Buni's magic spells were veiled designs for multi-purpose use. They could be used for fulfilling personal desires and for increasing personal power, or anything else that a person might desire, such as healing, purification, acquiring seership and invisibility. Yet Al-Buni's spells and conjuration came with his caveat that evil acts and intentions would bring about punishment, while godly acts and intentions would bring about reward. Moreover, some authorities, such as Noah Gardner, have argued that Al-Buni's spells "were intended to be circulated among a closed community of learned Sufis,"²⁶ and were never meant for broader readership among the uninitiated masses. Gardner goes on to point out that "Al-Buni intended his followers to read his core

works in conjunction with one another”²⁷ so that they formed a system or instrument for thought or knowledge. In fact, Al-Buni actually prohibited his followers to show or divulge his works containing “the secrets of wielding occult powers and the knowledge of hidden forces,” as evidenced by the following injunction from the *Shams Al-Ma’arif*: “It is forbidden for anyone who has this book of mine in hand to show it to someone not of his people and divulge it to one who is not worthy of it.”²⁸

Because of the dangers inherent in magical work, and the fact that the invocation of any being other than Allāh is believed to be tantamount to sorcery in Islam, a number of Muslims soundly reject Al-Buni’s work as clandestine magic. His work has also been criticized as having Assyrian (typically Syrian Christian) and Isra’iliyyat (Qabalistic) influences²⁹ and therefore of not being entirely Islamic.

Does this latter critique have a basis? Although the traditional view is that Sufism had its be-

ginnings in the first century, with its origins among Ashab al-Suffa³⁰ during the lifetime of the Prophet (SAW),³¹ other “Universalist” views trace the pre-Islamic roots of Sufism back to the early Christian mystics of Syria and Egypt, to the Essenes, the Pythagoreans, the Zoroastrians and others. Jewish influences were certainly present. During the Abbasid period (750–1258)—the Golden Age of Islam in which Al-Buni lived—Isra’iliyyat traditions (the body of narratives originating from Jewish and Christian traditions), were encouraged by many Muslim scholars. Their acceptance was no doubt based on the Prophet Muhammad’s well-known hadith, “Narrate [traditions] from the Children of Israel for there is nothing objectionable in that.”³²

When we compare the symbolic imagery from various cultures, we find a number of common symbols between Al-Buni and Judeo/Christian esoteric traditions. The Star of David or the Seal of Solomon (Figure 1) is among these symbols.

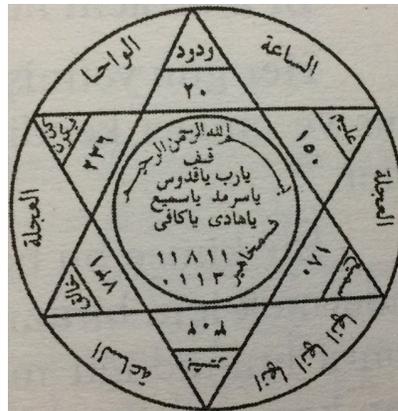


Figure 1: magical power for healing³³

This same symbol with different names and with its own unique characteristics has been used in the esoteric traditions of all three Abrahamic religions, as well as in the different branches of the Theosophical Movement. Its true origins, however, are thought to be Chal-

dean or Vedic.³⁴ While adherents among the three monotheistic faiths recognize their common roots and acknowledge a number of the same prophets, the more conservative elements of these faiths are not keen to acknowledge much commonality with respect to symbols.



Figure 2: The Star of David from Leningrad Codex, 1008 CE

But we must also consider that Islam is the last of the Abrahamic religions; therefore, it is not surprising to find similarities with the previous Abrahamic faiths. *Amantu* (the expression of belief) in Islam includes the belief in Allāh *Subhanahu wa ta'ala* (SWT, Glory or Exaltation”),³⁵ his prophets and books. *Shahada* (witnessing His Oneness and believing in Prophet Muhammad), is the primary and first step in Islam. However, as every Muslim knows, *Amantu*³⁶ includes the acceptance of and belief in all the prophets and holy books (in their original). From this perspective, believing in the power of a prophet’s seal, in this case and context the Seal of Solomon (AS),³⁷ and in all the prophets, is not at all contradictory to Islamic thought. After all, Hadhrat Solomon (AS), the son of David, is also a prophet in Islam who brought knowledge or wisdom from God or Allāh (SWT),³⁸ which included seals, sigils and other visual symbols.

With respect to the first of the two seals above, we might note that Al-Buni’s six-pointed star (*rub al-hizb*) generally depicts Islam’s “seal of the prophets.” But in this specific representation it provides for the miracle of healing as well as protection. In other representations, as a pentalfa, it retains its use as an ancient sign for conjuring spirits and spiritual forces. However, its usage is dependent upon the user’s character and spiritual stature. According to Hafez, a 13th century Persian Sufi Master and poet, “A man must be a Solomon before this magical seal will work.”³⁹

In the Judeo-Christian tradition, the six-pointed star or Seal of Solomon (Figure 2) is often viewed as a sign of God’s rulership and protection. It was the sign given to Solomon, the king of Jerusalem, by God, which allowed him to master and control the *Djinn* or spirits of the air, on the earth, and under the earth, and the means by which he wrought the building of the Temple.

Yet in the final analysis, the Seal of Solomon is a universal, multi-layered symbol, used to represent such ideas as the six-directions of space, the conjunction of Spirit and Matter in the manifested universe, and the Great Universe or primordial and eternal Oneness of the macrocosm and microcosm.

Structuring Conceptual Basis, Theoretical and Methodological Frames

In addition to touching upon the historical and esoteric/occult aspects of Al-Buni’s work, this article, as previously noted, takes up a sociological approach in examining Al-Buni’s work. As such, it seeks to touch upon human conduct, cultures and societies in order to explain and predict human behavior and interaction. A social science approach necessarily involves working with certain primary concepts, such as the physical and spiritual environment, social structures, functions, forces and goals. In this article we will look for certain fundamental concepts in the sociology

of religion, which will not only be useful in our study of Al-Buni, but also in any context on religious topics and issues.

The Sociology of Religion is a sub-discipline of sociology that focuses on the collective social dimensions of religion, relations between religion and society and the analysis of religious groups and related processes. When sociologists of religion concentrate on the inter-relations between societies and religion, they notice a relationship between religion and social stratification⁴⁰ This relation has a dynamic nature; for example, sometimes a similar social phenomenon may appear differently within different social classes, groups, ethnicities, etc. Hence, religion has a vital role in society and is impacted by general social influences.

Dr. Mustafa Aydin, one of the outstanding authorities in Turkey on the sociology of religion, emphasizes the importance and role of differentiation in society and their influences on religious life. Although Islam is strongly opposed to inequality of any kind, stratification develops when some groups have more access to power, privilege, information and other resources.

Theories in the sociology of religion provide a dual perspective on social stratification. On the one hand stratification influences and is reflected in religion; on the other hand religions/religious social orders have their own hierarchies, along with different layers of authority and knowledge. Sociologists have been attentive to stratification between different religions as a way of understanding rituals, beliefs, religious doctrines, social reflections and moral values. In Islam, mainstream religious practices are directed by scholars, different *madhab's* or schools of Islamic jurisprudence⁴¹, Sufi orders “and folk-Islam” have associated but sometimes separate approaches to religion.⁴² Although they share a foundation of common beliefs and core practices, the picture is varied, sometimes in a contradictory way.

In this article we will be referring to either the “sociology of Islam” or “Islamic sociology.” We recommend the following language for these terms: The sociology of Islam can be seen as a sociological practice focused on the

Islamic religion; however, Islamic sociology is a part of the intellectual activity in the circle of Islam undertaken by Muslim scholars. The first definition is a secular position. The second is an aspect of the religion in which Islam is viewed as part of a comprehensive reality.

According to Samiyah Mustafa Khashshab, Islamic sociology is the discipline of analyzing the data regarding Islamic thought. From a historical perspective this discipline investigates historical issues, values, thoughts, etc. using a scientific approach.⁴³ Khashshab claims that Islamic sociology has focused on the following subjects:

1. It examines the main religious foundations of society as an introduction to the social doctrines of Islam from a sociological perspective.
2. Islamic sociology analyzes social systems and the epiphenomena related to them and their structural dimensions/functions in a comprehensive way.
3. It focuses on the pioneers of social, anthropological and scientific thought in Islam, such as Ibn Haldun, Farabi, Masudi, Ibn Sina, etc.
4. Islamic sociology examines the contribution of Islamic thought to the universal values of social thought in order to provide a detailed analysis of this intellectual process and to protect Islamic thought from external blockages, which create crises.
5. It seeks to find scientific social laws, and to understand societies based on these laws.⁴⁴

This model is, of course, open to discussion. The point as to whether there are “laws” as defined by positivist sociologists is especially vulnerable and not really a strong argument after all the critical theories and philosophical critiques of Western thought since the last quarter of the 20th Century. Despite these issues, Khashshab’s efforts to establish a sociological model, is an important endeavor.

All these discussions about the sociology of Islam show us that regardless of the various theoretical positions, Islamic practices should

be considered in a societal context *and* as an historical influence. We can focus further on Al-Buni's esoteric work now, referring to necessary sociological concepts when it is required.

Looking at Al-Buni's Works

In the first chapter of *Shams al-Ma'arif al-Kubra*—his major work—Ahmad Al-Buni gives the clues towards his methodology in occult sciences. He emphasizes the esoteric/

hidden meanings and powers of letters (*huruf*), and numbers, and their interrelations with astrologic incidents.⁴⁵ He begins to reveal these secrets from the onset of the first chapter.

Al-Buni's esoteric model is like a web knit with letters, numbers, words and their meanings and functions being operative on different levels. His major works can be seen as a map of this mysterious universe of hidden knowledge.

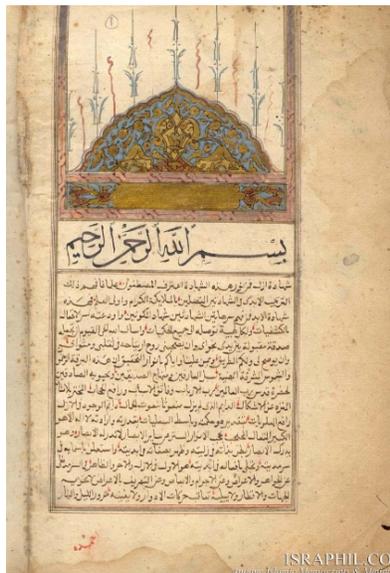


Figure 3: A 17th Century manuscript page from *Shams al-Ma'arif al-Kubra*

Shams al-Ma'arif al-Kubra has been read and its occult practices have been used for centuries in all Muslim countries. We might ask what motivated people to seek help from such a deeply esoteric source. Why did people make amulets and talismans (derived from the Greek verb “teleo,” which means to accomplish or bring into effect), modeled upon the instructions in his books? The motivations are as different and numerous as the many different types and classes of people who sought to use them. Each case, locale and social group, requires a different sociological research to understand the deeper reasons; but in general terms, all of these individuals and groups sought to invoke transcendent energies and forces in order to influence or alter the normal

course of events, whether they relate to the inner psychological or spiritual life, or social, secular living.

For Al-Buni, like all Sufi masters and the majority of Muslim *ummah* (nation), the ninety-nine Beautiful Names (*Asma'ul Husna*) of God embody the spiritual attributes of His essence and can be invoked to affect change in one's self, in others or the world. Even Muslims who are disinclined to accept esoteric practices usually admit that Allāh's (SWT) different names harness specific energies when recited by the believer.

Let us look at some of the names and the different powers that can be activated through these recitations. For instance, Al-Buni says

that when someone recites the name *Al-Alim* (The Knower of All) often, he or she gains the ability to speak with *hikmah* or divine knowledge and wisdom. The name *Al-Qawiyy* (The Possessor of All Strength) provides divine protection and security when properly recited.⁴⁶ Recitation of *Al-Barr* (The Doer of Good) results in the beautification of all states, both materially and spiritually. Recitation of *Al-Adl* (The Just) inspires one to be balanced or just in his/her every deed.⁴⁷ In addition to providing a detailed elucidation of all the hidden powers of the 99 Beautiful Names, Al-Buni offers additional occult practices connected to the recitation process, which are not common in mainstream Islamic practices involving the Qur'anic names of God.

Occult science, according to Rudolf Steiner, is in "a position to penetrate far deeper into the being of things than can be done by ordinary perception"⁴⁸ and this tendency to perceive more "deeply" is common to both the Eastern and Western esoteric traditions. However, it is essential to remember that for the true initiate there is neither West nor the East; there is the same Ocean of Light from which and to which the different paths or rivers flow.

Occult symbols and other forms of symbolism have been an important part of religious life for thousands of years. "Symbolism is," according to Herbert Silberer, "the most universal language that can be conceived. It is also the only language that is adapted to the various degrees of intensity as well as to the different levels of the intro-determination of living experience without requiring therefore a different means of expression; for what it contains and works with are the elementary types themselves [or symbols which are as adequate as possible to them] which, as we have seen, represent a permanent element in the stream of change."⁴⁹ The universal essence of esotericism may appear in different locales or "accents;" however, what is being sought is already seeking to be found. The sacred *Hadith Qudsi*⁵⁰ attributed to Allāh (SWT) says: "I was a hidden treasure and I loved (*ahbibtu*) to be known, ..." ⁵¹

An important element of Al-Buni's occult symbolism deals with the many different sides of social life, not just with the esoteric or religious aspects. The practices recommended in his works are mostly focused on finding solutions to social problems invoking such things as: money, health, jealousy, love, diseases, disasters and psychological issues. Sometimes, he advises working with a group of images, which are spread through his works, in order to create a sort of interconnected sacred geometry.

It must be stated here that the charms that will be explored here are full of hidden significances pertaining to the names of God, prophets, stars, mansions of the moon, angels and jinn, as well as to numbers and passages in the Qur'an, all of which are deliberately veiled and hidden from the uninitiated. Furthermore, different individuals and groups provide dissimilar interpretations involving the meaning of numbers. Various prayers and other key components in making and using these charms are missing. Therefore, a complete interpretation of the images presented herein is beyond the scope of this article.

Winning in this World with "Divine Protection"

The ultimate purpose of Islamic mysticism is to know Allāh and to attain peace and joy in the endless, eternal life, in other words to restore oneself within the primordial state of *fitra* as described in the Qur'an. However, in addition to providing a methodology for knowing God, Al-Buni seems to have wanted to offer people tools to help them through the trials and tribulations of every day life.⁵² Success and achievement in the world are also important. That is why millions of people have been practicing activities of this kind for centuries. There are many earthly gains on which people may focus. For instance, love, good health, economic advantages and financial plentitude are among the desires of this world. The following charm (Figure 4) is suggested by Al-Buni for financial gain and security.

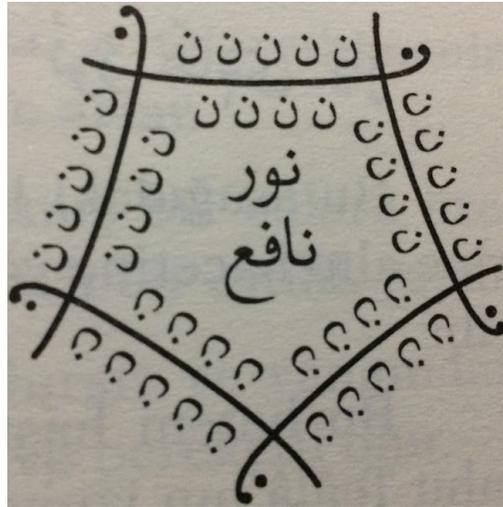


Figure 4: Charm for economic power⁵³

In Islamic and Sufi traditions numbers are seen as messengers. The above charm (Figure 4) consists of multiples of 4 and 5 “n’s” (ن), *Nun*’s or *Noon*’s. In the Sufi tradition the number 4 generally corresponds to the profane world, while the number 5 signifies constant appearance and manifestation. N or *Nun* means, among other things, “arising,” or “generation,” as in a sprouting seed or the seeds of the future.

In the Abjad number-letter system, *Nun* carries a numerical value of 50, which by itself represents benefit. There are a total of 45 n’s or *nun*’s (ن) in the above charm. In the Abjad system the number 45 represents the planet Saturn and the archangel Uzrā’īl (also Azrael and Izareel).⁵⁴ The 4+5 gives us the number 9, a number connected to the idea of attainment, satisfaction and accomplishment. We might also add that the number 9 leads to 1 and the beginning of a new cycle. The names in the

center of the pentagon are *Nour* or *Nur* (light or irradiation), *Nafie* (welfare or benefit), and signify beneficent light, and financial gain and security as mentioned above.

The charm is to be carried in the wallet by the person who wants to have financial abundance or preserve wealth. From time immemorial humans have sought wealth and worldly powers. Although greedy, self-seeking is certainly contrary to spiritual values, it is important to have one’s physical/financial needs met so that one is not locked in misery and struggle. Furthermore, sufficient finances provide a measure of security and the freedom to pursue more lofty goals, such as directing financial abundance to those in need. Indeed, as one of the five pillars of the faith, Islam places an emphasis on charity or *zakat*. But Muslims believe that charms such as the one above tend to be ineffective if one’s intentions are impure, and can create problems for the user.

The above charm (Figure 6) in Al-Buni's esoteric system is used to help find something or someone who is lost. This figure contains a five-pointed star or "guiding stellium." Such a stellium might also be used as a tool for summoning, but it also reminds one of the five pillars of Islam, the five daily prayers, and light or knowledge. The star itself is composed of triangles, which figure prominently in Islamic art, architecture and Islamic esoteric practices. The triangle is an ancient symbol having many hidden meanings. Among its many significances in Islam, it symbolizes unity in diversity, the synthesis of various virtues, the forces of life and the point where matter and consciousness connect with the higher realms. Its use here may be to Sumarian and Akkadian cuneiform texts as a tool that brings brightness to regions not warmed or lit by the light. Some of the words the charm contain are: "Allāh," "the one everlasting," and "Salim," meaning "safe" or "undamaged."

This charm or talisman, like many others contained within Al-Buni's works has an accompanying prayer written in Arabic.⁵⁷ Typically, for charms, Al-Buni outlines a triple application model:

1. The symbolic element, or figure
2. The recitation of a prayer or a divine name
3. Physical practices (such as the incorporation of certain materials or combinations of materials, specific actions or movements, etc.

Working with Al-Buni's charms, talismans and amulets also involves the cultivation of certain psychological attitudes in the mind of the practitioner. However, little research involving an interdisciplinary approach in the fields of sociology, religious studies, psychology and anthropology has been conducted into this aspect of Al-Buni's work thus far.

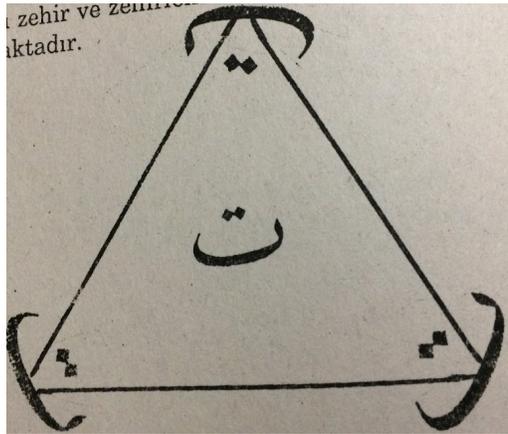


Figure 7: Healing for Poisoning⁵⁸

Figure 7, along with several others in Al-Buni's work, also utilize the geometry of the triangle. This charm uses the letter "t" or *Ta* (ت), a Sun or solar letter with a numerical value of 400 > 4, which is connected to the idea of "ending," in some Sufi orders,⁵⁹ as in the four phases of the moon: crescent, waxing, full and its eventual waning, as well as the four elements, the directions, seasons, the four humors—warm, cold, dry, humid, etc. Hence, four is a symbol of the manifest world and spatial order. The number four can also mean that

one undertakes a task with full, concretizing energy.⁶⁰

T or *Ta* is usually categorized as corresponding to the element of air, but also to the earth element in some systems. This particular talisman is used to heal a person who has been poisoned, especially one who has been bitten by a venomous snake, insect or scorpion. However, its healing powers are only activated with the addition of certain ritual practices and the inclusion of various materials, such as water, silver and camel leather. The materials used in

the making of charms like this one were based on the Laws of Antipathy and Affinity.⁶¹ Among its other uses is the healing of viral diseases, such as pox.⁶² Work with this charm must be accompanied by the recitation of a special prayer.

The charm below (Figure 8) is an expression of *Basmala* the name of the incipient or opening lines of the Qur'an, which reads *bismillāh*

ar-rahmāni ar-rahīm. It can be translated roughly as: "I begin in the name of Allāh, the Most Compassionate, the Most Merciful." Al-Buni maintains that anyone who carries this talisman or charm is given the power to arouse a higher sympathy in the people around him or in his social circles.⁶³ This is grounded on the idea that the user's first action is based on the blessings of Allāh or God, who is the source of all action and aid.

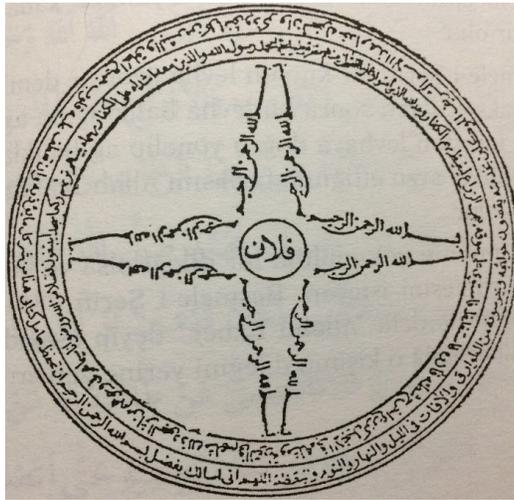


Figure 8: Esoteric writing of Basmala⁶⁴

This same charm can also be seen as a way to increase leadership skills, when the charm is prepared and used in the prescribed way. Today, individuals, especially those in the professional sphere who are seeking to be more effective may receive help from life coaches or mentors. In the past, this charm had a similar function. People's needs remain the same while the tools to achieve them continuously change.

One of the most mysterious occult practices in *Shams Al-Ma'arif* concerns the Arabic letter *Shin*, (ش) *Sheen* or *Šīn*, as can be seen in the charm below (Figure 9). *Shin* is a solar letter with a numerical value of 300 and is related to the element of fire. This charm has a connection to one of the *Asma'ul Husna* or 99 Beautiful Names, *Al Quddus* (القدوس), The Most Holy, which begins with the Arabic letter *Shin*. The letter *Shin* symbolizes the presence within and equates to the Arabic *Shakina* and the He-

brew *Shekinah*. *Shin* is also one of several letters in the Arabic alphabet that is constructed of three upward lines with three dots above, which might be said to represent the Kingdom, and the King-like qualities of majesty and dignity. Hence, this charm is thought to impart majesty and dignity to the user.

The person working with this charm must recite a special prayer, which is said to invoke the service angel of this letter whose name is *Jibr'il*, also spelled *Jibreel* or *Gabriel*, and whose name in the Abjad system has a value of 245.⁶⁵ The number 245 is the same number as *ar-ruh*, or Spirit.⁶⁶ The appearance of the angel carries a potent spiritual energy since angels are beings that dwell in the presence of God or Allāh. They are most often thought to be light or fire beings that serve as intermediaries between the heavenly and earthly realms. Hence, Islamic esotericism, like any other esotericism, can give entry to supermundane dimensions

that are not yet explainable by the current state of scientific knowledge and the methodologies of the hard sciences.

The service angel *Jibr'il* is one of the most important angels in the Qur'an. It was he who

appeared to Muhammad in the cave of Hijra and revealed the Qur'an to the Prophet. Thus, he is the bearer of revelation and inspiration. *Jibr'il* also has the ability to protect and purify and to breathe Allah's spirit into a person.

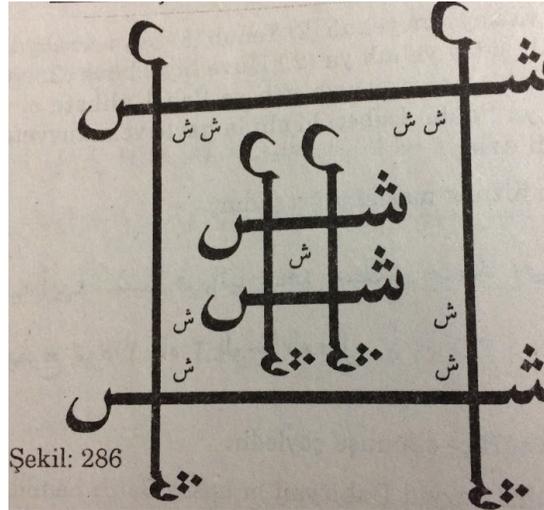


Figure 9: The charm of Shin

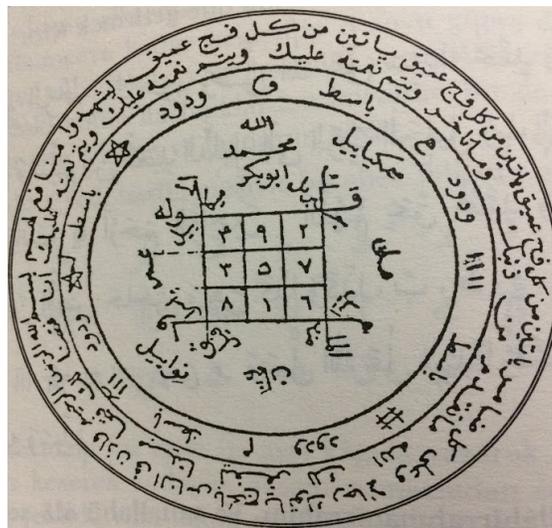


Figure 10: Charm for barakah and protection

(Figure 10) can be used for those in search of *barakah* (divine blessing and plentitude). Barakah can be sought for pious motives where it expresses as a flow of blessings and the experience of a closer connection with Allāh (SWT). It can also be sought in business, or for protection from the evil eye and envy. When it is used for business, the charms must

be kept in the shop, office or place of work. When used for protection, the individual needs to keep it on his or her body.⁶⁷ This particular charm is composed of an esoteric combination of text, letters, a 3 x 3 magic square and numbers reminiscent of certain Qabalistic charms.

We can see that ancient esoteric knowledge was employed for both earthly, pragmatic rea-

sons, and for spiritual reasons. The very same charm was often designed with a dual purpose in mind: for acquiring spiritual and/or material/practical benefit. The use of esoteric knowledge for materialistic or purely earthly motives has been, and still is, a common fact of life. Such use extends to temples, churches and other places of prayer and worship where petitioners seek to apply for divine and/or earthly aid.

Many of the charms in the Bunian corpus are used for the healing of the sick. In order to heal a person one should know the name of the disease. Here, there is a semiotic⁶⁸ connection between the name and disease itself. Knowing the name allows for a shift to another signifying level where the first letter of the name is used along with a recitation to call in the “service angel” that corresponds to that name. This chain of semiotic levels serves to provide healing to the sick person.⁶⁹ Such alternative medical practices have both spiritual and physical components akin to that of Ayurveda and other holistic approaches to healing. There is of course a psychological dimension that comes into play with respect to healing outcomes. Such research is beyond the scope of the present article and should be approached separately based on sociological and anthropological methodologies.

The Arabic letter “r” or *Ra* (ر), and its mysterious functions require a special focus in the

charm below (Figure 11). *Ra* is considered to be a “Sun” letter with a value of 200 in the Abjad System.⁷⁰ There are 24 “*Ra*’s” in the charm below. Thus we have $200 \times 24 = 4,800 \Rightarrow 12$ and > 3 . The number 12 signifies completed perfection and is associated with the name Allāh (ALLH), which equates to the numbers $66 \Rightarrow 6+6 = 12$. Twelve is also a number that figures prominently in the Qur’an and in nature, having to do with, among other things, perfection, completion, and periodic movements and circulations. Twelve is the higher octave of 3 and is an indicator of great understanding and wisdom.

The number 3 represents synthesis and a sequence of spiritual events relating to manifestation. Verse 1: 3 in the Qur’an, corresponds to the number 3 and to Allāh’s compassion and mercy. The number 3 also corresponds to unicity, as well as the three important steps or degrees in Islam: Islamic law (*shari’a*), spiritual path (*tariqa*) and divine Truth (*Haqiqa*).

In Sufi traditions *Ra* “is symbolic of *Tawhīd*, unity oneness with Allāh. The letter *Ra* or R, represents return of all things to the One, which is the principal reason for existence.”⁷¹ *Ra* appears in *Ar-Rahman* (beneficent), the first of Allāh’s attributes, and in *Ar-Rahīm* (merciful), the second attribute or beautiful name. Working with this letter, like all other letters, necessitates proper timing and special conditions.

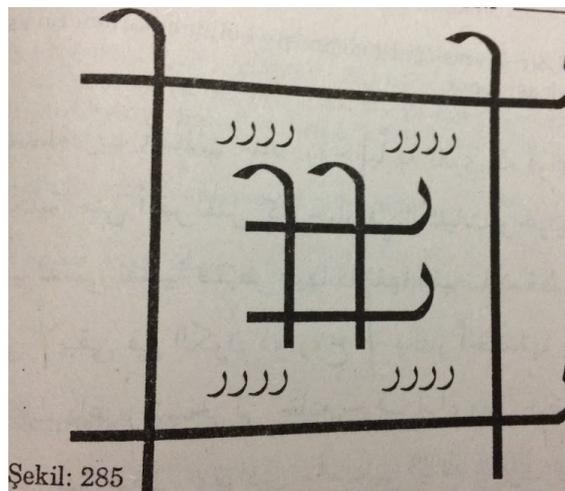


Figure 11: The Charm of Ra Letter

The example above shows that the knowledge of Al-Buni's corpus extended beyond the Arabic world and North Africa. In this charm we see the transfer of knowledge between different parts of the world where Islam spread.

Al-Buni provided only limited information concerning the charm below (Figure 13).⁷⁸ We know that he deliberately excluded certain esoteric information from his books to safeguard it from the ignorant or unworthy. That means that facets of his esoteric knowledge were probably handed down to his disciples by oral transmission.

The geometric arrangement of this charm, however, is most interesting. The charm seems to be a geometric yantra of sorts that may have

been used for meditation, concentration or a for creating a pattern of energy or force.

The names in the middle of the grid refer to Allāh and his primary prophets, i.e., Abraham, Jacob, Muhammad, Suleiman (or Solomon), Zakaraia, Ishmael, Yunus or Joseph, Jesus, Moses, Elias, Lut or Lot, etc. Belief in apostleship exists within the framework of *Tawhid* (Unity), and the prophets form a unity and wholeness in regard to the historical chain, and the main theme of their messages.⁷⁹

The names of prophets and religious figures are thought to have the power to protect an individual by acting as conduits between these holy figures and anyone carrying the charm or talisman.

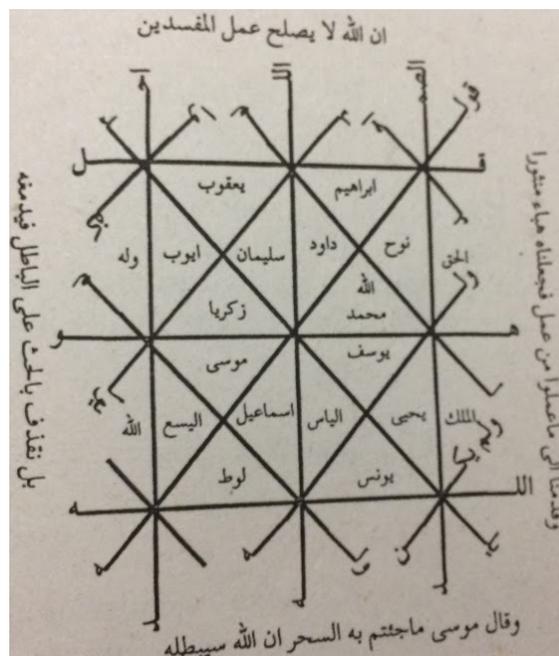


Figure 13⁸⁰

Figure 14 below, serves to ensure love between two persons. Rose water is used in conjunction with this charm as well as some of the individual's personal belongings. The charm also includes a special prayer.⁸¹ There are seven five-pointed stars in this charm. Seven is an important number in Islam. The Qur'an contains 25 references to the number 7, such as the seven heavens, seven hells, the seven periods of creation, seven paths to enlightenment, sev-

en counter clockwise circumambulations around the Ka'ba in Mecca, the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus and so forth.⁸² "An allusion made to the number seven in the Qur'an typically includes references to God as the all-powerful creator. Thus, the number 7 is directly linked to the power of the divine and has great symbolic value as an expression of Muslim belief and the miracles of God."⁸³ In some Sufi traditions, the number 7 is related to the seventh

paradise of intimacy or the relationship of the lover to the Beloved or Divine.

In addition to the number 7, the number 5 figures prominently—the five elements of which man is made, which corresponds to the five healing elemental breaths in some Sufi practices, the five daily prayers, five pillars of Islam and the five categories of Islamic law. Hence, the five-pointed stars included here might well serve as a reminder of the importance adhering to basic tenets of spiritual life as a foundation for any endeavor. This same number is also associated with the Ishtar and the planet Venus, which rules Friday and the fifth “paradise of bliss” in some Sufi traditions.

The Love charm, reading from right to left, contains a combination of nine letters and

numbers: a number nine (٩), two number eights (٨), another nine (٩), the letter “t” (ط), having an equivalency of nine, the Arabic number one, *Alif* (ا), and two more “t” each have an equivalency of nine. Hence, we have: $9+8+8+9+9+1+9+9=71 > 8$. In addition to pertaining to the 7 heavens, 7 can pertain to the seven levels of the heart and the seven eternal attributes of God’s essence. The Number 1 symbolizes primordial unity, the very essence of the Divine, and the First Cause. Taken together 71 might be interpreted as Allāh—the One—and His creation in its Fullness. As for the number 8, Muslims and Sufi’s believe that, among other things, this number signifies the eternity of life, the eight angels that carry out God’s plan, and to one or more of the eight gardens of Paradise.⁸⁴

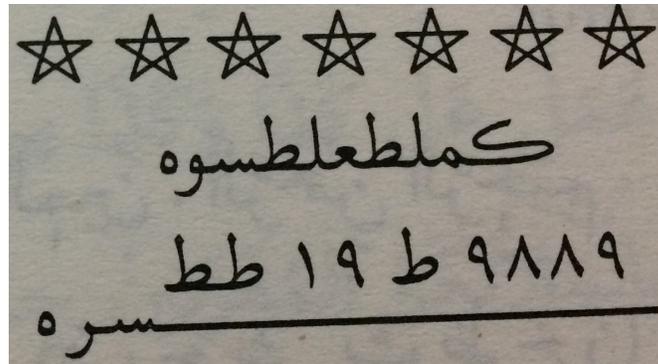
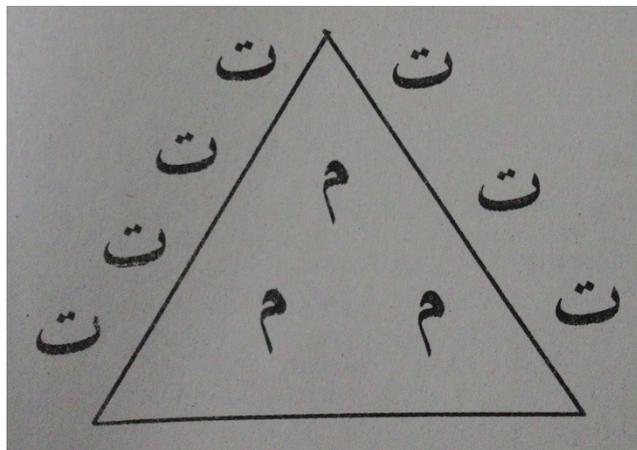


Figure 14: Love Charm

It is interesting to note that rather than viewing love as a natural organic process, many civilizations sought to ensure love or attraction between the sexes by exerting some kind of influence upon one or both of the individuals involved. Such practices were not rooted in natural or mutual attraction between the sexes. Rather, they were often enacted for pragmatic and/or for purely selfish reasons, but they could also be used to heal marital strife or rekindle desire for married couples.

Triangles, as previously noted, figure prominently in Al-Buni’s work as an esoteric medium for establishing good relations and positive energy with a bride who is about to be married. Figure 15 below is employed for just this purpose. We might note here that the triangle is said to represent the union of the male and the female that creates a third entity or thing. Triangles also represent a strong foundation and stability—key factors in a good marriage.

Figure 15⁸⁵

Although the purpose of (Figure 15) has not been revealed, the charm consists of a triangle, a Pythagorean and Sufi symbol for completion. The triangle is surrounded by 7 “*Ta's*” or “*Taa's*” (ت), and contains 3 “*M's*” (م). The letter *Ta* has a numerical value of 400 and is related to the element of air. The letter is important to Sufis because it is the first letter of *Tawhīd* or God’s oneness and unity. *Ta* is related to divine ecstasy, the perfection of the senses and the experience of the Adamic state. *M*, *Mim* or *Meem* has a value of 40 and corresponds to the element of fire. The number 40 could be a reference to a symbolic period of time or seclusion (forty years and/or forty days) needed before spiritual revelation and guidance can be gained. The letter *M* also pertains to the messengers of Allāh, such as Muhammad, who are the heralds of revelation.

As previously mentioned, Al-Buni uses the figure of the triangle quite frequently in his work. The triangle is a symbol of great esoteric significance and figures prominently in Islamic art and architecture. The triangle, which represents nexus and the power of three, is employed to explain how forms came into existence. This figure is also an important symbol in Western esotericism. It is the Triad of Pythagoras and its sacredness is derived from the fact that it is made up of the monad and the duad. Triangles were believed to represent the balance of opposites and their eventual synthesis. Some occultists also use the triangle as a summoning symbol in order to call in specific

entities and energies having spiritual power.⁸⁶ Al-Buni’s frequent use of the triangle and other esoteric symbols in his corpus incorporates many of these meanings.

“The Universe,” as Helena Blavatsky understood, “is guided, controlled, and animated from within outwards by an almost endless series of Hierarchies of spiritual and divine beings.”⁸⁷ This idea is in accord with the Islamic tradition of Angels (*Malā'ikah*), which are created from light, and *Djinn*,⁸⁸ which are comprised of smokeless fire. These unseen spiritual entities and creatures are said to exist in a parallel world to humans, but interaction between them is indeed possible. The triangle, in addition to other charm and talisman symbols is used to invoke these spirits who then serve as intermediaries between humans and God. Such beliefs and practices in Islam and in the other esoteric traditions reveal the universality of the esoteric sciences.

Analysis

From the dawn of time human beings have needed shelter, safety and peace from a world that was largely beyond their comprehension. Religion, in one form or another, has provided humanity with meaning and an explanation of the energies and forces at work in the world. Furthermore, religion has given humanity a means of acquiring a measure of power over the world of invisible energies and forces that would otherwise seem to be beyond their control. Religious practice, as the Polish

anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski (1884–1942) explained, “is an active organized effort to remain in touch with supernatural powers, to influence them, and to respond to their bid-dings.”⁸⁹ Individuals have empowered them-selves through these “organized efforts” in an effort to control or collaborate with supernatu-ral powers. Al-Buni’s corpus perfectly exem-plifies this effort with its focus on the esoteric or inner knowledge (*batin*) within the Islamic faith.

Al-Buni’s esoteric/occult methods of religious practice provide a gradual, multi-layered mod-el for purposefully invoking and directing su-pernatural energy and force. This model can be visualized as a pyramid-like system. The base of the pyramid is comprised of humanity’s un-ending need for such things as protection, health, power, authority, love, friendship, peace and wealth. The underlying motives that fuel humanity’s needs and longings are as var-ied as the many different needs and desires themselves.

The sides of the pyramid are represented by the charm and its related rituals. The visual design of the talisman or charm utilized differ-ent geometric forms, colors and materials, such as, stone, metal or wood, as these were associ-ated with certain planets and numbers. Certain practices also involved burning, melting and or burying as a means of strengthening the charm’s power. The vast majority of Al-Buni’s charms must be made by a specialist practiced in the occult arts. Those who intend to put the charm to use may also require the guidance of a specialist.

The upper point or apex of the pyramid serves as a gateway between the one who needs the charm or talisman and a power at a higher lev-el. In most instances, this would be the specific angel who is responsible for facilitating the work. However, between these two layers there are multi-facetted connections taking place either on a parallel level or a much high-er plane. This is especially the case with re-spect to the use of the Names of God (SWT), since their specific use not only provides pro-tection, but a pathway to the highest supreme power or Allāh (SWT). In Islam, Allāh’s (SWT)

Ninety-Nine Names signify the many different attributes of the One. In Al-Buni’s corpus, when the Names or *Asma’ul Husna* are written or spoken the specific attribute or some preter-natural or magical effect can manifest in the user’s life. But it should be noted there that from an Islamic perspective any change or transformation that results can only happen through the Will of Allāh (SWT).

As mentioned above, from an anthropological perspective humanity necessitated a religious support for dealing with these problems.

The French sociologist Emile Durkheim, who established the academic discipline of sociolog-y and the social sciences, held that there are strong connections between religion and hu-manity’s need for social stability and equilibri-um in the face of the challenges that they en-dured in their contacts with the world.⁹⁰ Durk-heim also maintained that: “people experi-enced a fundamental need to create and experi-ence the sacred because of their innate sense of being part of a greater whole.”⁹¹ Therefore, both mainstream and esoteric religious practice served as a means of achieving stability, pro-tection and integration within a given society and the greater whole. Religious and occult rites also provided a sense of empowerment and security in a world full of ambiguities. This is especially the case with respect to the application of “secret knowledge” due to its more exclusive character. The power acquired through access to hidden knowledge has, in many instances led to fame and notoriety. Such attention, through the centuries, inevitably led to the blending of hidden knowledge with dif-ferent forms of “folk religion” and to syncretic belief systems. This is precisely what hap-pened with respect to certain facets of Al-Buni’s esotericism, which gained widespread appeal in the popular culture of Islam. It must be noted again that the specific details of the certain esoteric technologies are still more or less hidden from the non-initiate.⁹²

Different forms of religious culture have pro-vided various levels of compatibility with so-cieties. It is suggested that “the form of reli-gious culture which is perhaps most compati-ble with modernity is that which grants a lim-

ited scope to the sacred and which promotes a low degree of integration between corporate and individual value systems.”⁹³ According to Richard Fenn,

It is occult and esoteric religion which best exemplifies this type of religious culture. It can be practiced without coming into conflict with everyday occupational roles since it confines itself to particular times, places, objects, and issues. It provides an ecstatic and magical form of activity and an opportunity to indulge in the irrational against the enforced rationality of formal and bureaucratically structured organisations and roles of everyday life.⁹⁴

Because of this compatibility, Al-Buni’s charms and esoteric practices have survived for centuries and are used widely today in modern societies, such as Turkish society. These practices have multidimensional, anthropological and sociological functions, which even today serve to help people meet personal and societal needs.

Al-Buni’s corpus can be seen as a part of the general “gnostic” circle of religion. When we scrutinize these kinds of religious identities, we see that;

Manipulationist or *Gnostic* sects emphasize a body of esoteric knowledge, which, it is alleged, enables members or followers to attain important goals, often material as much as spiritual, in this life. The knowledge involved is often of a mystical kind requiring long study through which enlightenment slowly comes.⁹⁵

The above description is more or less applicable to Al-Buni’s model as well. The knowledge provided by him requires a long study under proper tutelage, however its purpose is not only enlightenment, but the fulfillment of material/physical aims. Regardless of his intentions and religious identity, his followers are highly engaged with his work due to its material aspect. Hence, when we compare Al-Buni’s work with traditional methods of Sufism (which are based on the purification of the soul and the truth of divine love and knowledge), his esotericism and magical

method open more earthly doors with strategies aimed toward winning in the world. This is the picture we see when we look at Al-Buni’s works and practices through the prism of sociology of religion. Where he fits in the history of thought, and what his real intentions are, are entirely different issues, which are best studied by Islamic historians.

Conclusion

Chaos is the unknown circle that human beings and societies are not keen to enter. Order is the safe environment in which all the values of civilization have sprung. But, as the ancient Latin expression *Ordo Ab Chao*⁹⁶ indicates, without chaos or disorder there would never be order. Hence, understanding “Order” requires an understanding of “Chaos.” They are the two ends of a continuum. Different schools have different teachings as to how to understand and establish Order. But the most important place to create Order is within; within the emotions, the mind, and the soul. Doing so allows us to equitably manage the full spectrum of life, with all of its unpredictability and to find the real source of illumination and enlightenment.

However, the journey towards purification, spiritual fulfillment, and wholeness is a life-long task—one that requires persistent, self-initiated effort. The highly exclusive esoteric methods are not for the majority of people who are held captive by personal and material interests, or who, for other reasons, are simply not at the needed stage of inner development. Throughout history, as we have witnessed in all the civilizations of the East and West, many people have resorted to shortcuts or immediate fixes rather than undertake the necessary spiritual work and arduous philosophical study. Many magical and occult practices serve to meet this demand.

Today, Al-Buni’s work functions as an alternative for meeting the everyday, immediate needs of life in Muslim societies. His magic squares, talismans and charms are used for such things as love, protection, economic benefits, health, safety and success. Those who utilize Al-Buni’s occult practices are aiming

for direct and quick solutions. This can be generalized for usage of charms in other civilizations as well.

There is a pyramidal model in Al-Buni's work: it starts from the most material base, with humanity's material needs and demands, and reaches to Allāh (SWT) or God, the highest, most supreme power. Despite the invocation of *Djinn* and other supernatural powers, Al-Buni understood, as do all Muslims, that all creation, power, healing, accomplishments and the solution to every problem comes only from Allāh (SWT). For if Allāh (SWT) says: Kun! (كُنْ)⁹⁷ or "Be", then it is, it exists!⁹⁸ From the Islamic perspective, Al-Buni's charms and prayers can only be answered if the user holds this realization in his or her heart and mind. Therefore, "All Praise belongs to Allāh."⁹⁹

We may ask, if success comes only from God, why there are so many different means and methods of reaching the final and highest aim. As Sufis frequently say: "*al-turuq ila'Llah bi'adadi anfas al-khala'iq* (there are as many paths to God as there are human breaths)".¹⁰⁰ Pluralistic and diverse religious beliefs and practices have existed since the beginning of Islamic history. Al-Buni's esoteric model and its practices are among the diverse socio-cultural aspects of the religion.

In our analysis of Al-Buni's work we learn that letters and numbers have hidden meanings and powers. This is reminiscent of the significance of numbers in Hinduism, Greek isopsephy and especially in the Kabbalah, which has similar theories and applications based on hidden meanings. When we admit "the one source" for religion, esoteric traditions and mystical paths the similarities cannot surprise at all. These similarities can be seen in the architecture of temples, various rituals, social and cultural beliefs and practices. As noted previously, "Al-Buni also made regular mention in his work of Plato, Aristotle, Hermes, Alexander the Great, and obscure Chaldean magicians. In one of his works, he recounted a story of his discovery of a cache of manuscripts buried under the pyramids, that included a work of Hermetic thinkers."¹⁰¹ So, interchange and exchange of knowledge between different intel-

lectual worlds exists as the basis of these "similarities." Ancient masters were more open than their descendants to give and receive from the "others!"

Semiology and symbology reveal important new dimensions not only within the context of Al-Buni's corpus, but in esoteric systems in general. A detailed semiological analysis of Al-Buni's works is beyond the limits of this article. However, in addition to a semiological analysis, a comprehensive understanding of the Abu'l Abbas Ahmad ibn Ali ibn Yusuf al-Buni's multi-layered magic squares, talismans and charms, must also be studied within their various socio-historical and socio-cultural contexts. Further sociological research into Al-Buni's fascinating corpus will allow us to better understand how his works address certain human needs that are not satisfied by the more secular solutions of the modern world.

***Note:** The authors of this article wish to emphasize that they do not support the use of magic. The investigation of Al-Buni's images is for scholarly purposes only. Neither does this article provide sufficient information for their use.

¹ *Encyclopedia Iranica*, "Magic in Literature and Folklore During the Islamic Period." <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/magic-ii-in-literature-and-folklore-in-the-islamic-period>. (accessed June 12, 2017).

² In this co-authored article one of the writers, M. Kubilay Akman, wanted to emphasize his strong belief to the following hadith (saying) of Prophet (SAW): "There are three who will not enter paradise: one who is addicted to wine, one who breaks ties of relationship, and one who believes in magic." (Al-Tirmidhi Hadith, Hadith 1031, <http://www.alim.org/library/hadith/TIR/1031>). Hence, the quotation here is used solely for scholarly reasons and not used to defend nor support any kind of magical practices.

³ Esoteric practices refer to those that form the "inner" dimension of a religion or spiritual tradition. Occult practices are those that are deliberately "hidden" or "concealed," that are only made available and understood by a select group. The occult sciences also tend to

- deal with the so-called “supernatural or paranormal activities.”
- 4 Thomas Gale, *Magic in Islam*. <http://www.encyclopedia.com/environment/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/magic-magic-islam> (accessed June 19, 2017).
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 See for example, *White and Black Magic in the European Renaissance*, by Paolo Zambelli (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 193.
- 7 The term, *Qur’anic theurgy*, is a term coined by Dr. Saiyad Nizamuddin Ahmad, from the Department of Islamic and Arabic Studies at the American University in Cairo, to describe occult practices that have their basis in the Qur’an.
- 8 In certain Arabic and Persian orders, strict rules were applied when Allāh’s greatest names were used or invoked for magical purposes.
- 9 Saiyad Nizamuddin Ahmad, *Magic and the Occult Islam: Ahmad b. ‘Alī al -Būnī and the Shamsal -ma ‘ārif*. <https://www.scribd.com/document/148669437/Warburg-Institute-Magic-and-the-Occult-in-Islam> (accessed June 28, 2017).
- 10 Yasmine F. Al-Saleh, “Licit Magic”: The Touch And Sight Of Islamic Talismanic Scrolls. Doctoral dissertation presented to the Committee for Middle East Studies, Harvard University, 2014, 3.
- 11 Ibid.
- 12 The Islamic Golden Age is traditionally dated from the mid-7th century to the mid-13th century at which Muslim rulers established one of the largest empires in history. During this period, artists, engineers, scholars, poets, philosophers, geographers and traders in the Islamic world contributed to agriculture, the arts, economics, industry, law, literature, navigation, philosophy, sciences, sociology, and technology, both by preserving earlier traditions and by adding inventions and innovations of their own.
- 13 See for example: *Forbidden Knowledge? Notes on the Production, Transmission, and Reception of the Major Works of Ahmad Al-Buni*, by Noah Gardner, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, 87.
- 14 Denis MacEoin, “Nineteenth-Century Babi Talismans,” *Studia Iranica*, 14:1 (Belgium: PeetersPublishers, 1985), 77-98.
- 15 Ahmed Al-Buni, *Berhatiah: Ancient Magic Conjunction of Power* (Vancouver: Ishtar Publishing, 2010), 30.
- 16 Jean Canteins, “The Hidden Sciences in Islam,” in *Islamic Spirituality* (ed; S.N. Nasr; New York: Crossroads Publishing, 1997), 449.
- 17 Edward A. Tiryakian, *On the Margin of the Visible: Sociology, the Esoteric, and the Occult*. Contemporary Religious Movements: A Wiley-Interscience Series (New York: Wiley and Sons, 1974), 3.
- 18 As quoted from *Theories of Religion: A Reader*, edited by Seth Daniel Kunin and Jonathan Miles-Watson (Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), 231.
- 19 Helena Blavatsky, “The Science of Magic: Proofs of its Existence — Mediums in Ancient Times,” *Spiritual Scientist*, Boston, Vol. III, October 14, 1875, pp. 64-5, <http://www.theosociety.org/pasadena/bcw/b75-10-14.htm> (accessed June 12, 2017).
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- 21 Matthew Melvin-Koushki, *The Occult Sciences in Islamicate Cultures* (13th-17th Centuries), workshop synopsis, Department of Near Eastern Studies, Princeton University.
- 22 Ibid.
- 23 Frank Klaassen, *The Transformations of Magic: Illicit Learned Magic in the Later Middle Ages and Renaissance* (State College, Pa: Penn State University Press, 2013), 187-188.
- 24 See Nineveh Shadrach’s commentary on Al-Buni’s *Berhatiah*, i-iv.
- 25 Yasmine F. Al-Saleh, *Licit Magic: The Touch And Sight Of Islamic Talismanic Scrolls*, <https://dash.harvard.edu/handle/1/12274637> (accessed July 17, 2017).
- 26 Noah Gardner, *Esotericism in Manuscript Culture: Ahmad al-Buni and His Readers Through the Mamluk Period* (Dissertation, Univ. of Michigan, 2014, xvii).
- 27 Ibid., 23.
- 28 Ibid., 28-29.
- 29 Islam Ansiklopedisi, vol. 6, p. 416, <http://www.islamansiklopedisi.info/dia/pdf/c06/c060281.pdf> (accessed April 7, 2017).
- 30 About Ashab al-Suffa: <http://www.lastprophet.info/ashab-al-suffa> (accessed February 02, 2018)
- 31 Islamic honorifics are words that M. Kubilay Akman uses frequently in his individual arti-

cles. Many Muslim scholars use neutral names without adding any honorifics. Since this is a coauthored texts you can see both approaches in terms of honorifics.

32 Marc Steven Bernstein, *Stories of Joseph: Narrative Migrations Between Judaism and Islam* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2006), 9.

33 Imam Ahmet Bin Ali El-Buni, *Menbai Usulu'l Hikmet* (Turkish translation: M. Varli-S; (Istanbul, Oguz, Esmâ Publications, Istanbul: 2011), 814.

34 For more on the origins and esoteric significance of the Seal of Solomon see: <https://blavatskytheosophy.com/esoteric-symbolism/> (accessed June 28, 2017).

35 *Subhanahu wa ta'ala* or SWT, trans.; as "Glory to Him, the Exalted." When using the name of Allāh, the shorthand of "SWT" indicates an act of reverence and devotion toward God.

36 See for example: www.questionislam.com/article/what-does-amantu-mean-what-are-fundamentals-belief-included-amantu, (accessed October 12, 2017).

37 (AS) *Alayhis Salaam*, trans.; Peace be upon him.

38 (SWT) *Subhanahu wa-ta'ala*, trans.; glorified and exalted be He.

39 As quoted from, *Sufi Thought and Action*, by Idris Shaw.

40 Unver Gunay, *Din Sosyolojisi* (Istanbul: İnsan Publications, 2014), 315.

41 Schools of Islamic Jurisprudence, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/madhab> (accessed October 28, 2017)

42 Necdet Subasi, *Din Sosyolojii* (Istanbul: Dem Publications, 2014), 165-166.

43 Samiye Hassab, *Islam Sosyolojisi* (Turkish translation, A. Coskun-N. Ozmen; Istanbul: Camlica Publications, 2010), 66.

44 *Ibid.*, 66-68.

45 Imam Ahmet Bin Ali El-Buni, *Sems'ul Maarif'ul Kubra*, Vol. 1, 19-39

46 *Ibid.*, 238.

47 *Ibid.*, 236.

48 Rudolf Steiner, *An Outline of Occult Science*, The Project Gutenberg EBook, 2009, 228.

49 Herbert Silberer, *Hidden Symbolism of Alchemy and the Occult Arts*, The Project Gutenberg EBook, 2009, 284.

50 For further information on the *Hadith Qusdi* or sacred sayings of Allāh as related to the

Prophet see: www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t125/e760.

51 www.ibnarabisociety.org/articles/addas1.html.

52 Yasmine F. Al-Saleh, *Licit Magic: The Touch And Sight Of Islamic Talismanic Scrolls*.

53 Imam Ahmet Bin Ali El-Buni, *Menbai Usulu'l Hikmet*, 215.

54 See for example: Eugenia Victoria Ellis, *Geomantic Mathematical Creation: (re) Magic Squares and Claude Bragdon's Theosophic Architecture*, Published in Nexus V: Architecture and Mathematics (June 2004), 84. Also, Annamarie Schimmel, *The Mystery of Numbers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 30.

55 Imam Ahmet Bin Ali El-Buni, *Sems'ul Maarif'ul Kubra*, Vol. 3, 200.

56 Imam Ahmet Bin Ali El-Buni, *Menbai Usulu'l Hikmet*, 649.

57 *Ibid.*, 648-652.

58 Imam Ahmet Bin Ali El-Buni, *Sems'ul Maarif'ul Kubra*, Vol. 3, 212.

59 See for example: the Chisti website, http://www.chishti.ru/s_m.htm. (accessed Oct 3, 2017).

60 Annamarie Schimmel, *The Mystery of Numbers*, 104.

61 The Laws of Affinity and Antipathy are two of the great laws of magic and are related to the idea of vibration, to attraction and separations respectively. The Laws of Affinity or Sympathy meant that things acted upon or cured what they resembled or had some *affinity* for. In other words, "Like cures like." Antipathy was based on things that were diametrically opposed. For example, if two animals were antagonists in the natural world, then a remedy from one could help cure wounds caused by the other.

62 Annamarie Schimmel, *The Mystery of Numbers*, 212-213.

63 Imam Ahmet Bin Ali El-Buni, *Menbai Usulu'l Hikmet*, 159-160.

64 *Ibid.*, 159.

65 Robert Abdul Hayy Darr, *Abjad: The Numerological Language of Spiritual Insight and Guidance as Employed in Sufism*. Presented at the Temenos Academy at the Royal Asiatic Society, London, July 2008, 4.

66 Imam Ahmet Bin Ali El-Buni, *Menbai Usulu'l Hikmet*, 159.

67 *Ibid.*, 366.

- 68 See for example, *Semiotics for Beginners*, at: visualmemory.co.uk/daniel/Documents/S4B/sem03.html (accessed July 20, 2017).
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- 72 Imam Ahmet Bin Ali El-Buni, *Sems 'ul Maarif'ul Kubra*, Vol. 4, 75-76.
- 73 Ibid., 130.
- 74 Frithjof Schoun, *Sufism: Veil and Quintessence* (Bloomington: World Wisdom, Inc., 2008), 107.
- 75 Wali Ali Meyer, Bilal Hyde, Faisal Muqaddam, Shabda Kahn, *Physicians of the Heart: A Sufi View of the Ninety Nine Names of God*, San Francisco: Sufi Ruhaniat International, 2011), 2.
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- 77 Imam Ahmet Bin Ali El-Buni, *Sems 'ul Maarif'ul Kubra*, Vol. 4, 128-132.
- 78 Imam Ahmet Bin Ali El-Buni, *Sems 'ul Maarif'ul Kubra*, Vol. 1, 384.
- 79 Sinasi Gunduz, *The Role of Prophets in Religion*. <http://www.lastprophet.info/the-role-of-prophets-in-religion>. (accessed February 25, 2018).
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- 81 Imam Ahmet Bin Ali El-Buni, *Menbai Usulu'l Hikmet*, 371.
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- 94 Ibid., 209-210.
- 95 Ibid., 237
- 96 *Ordo Ab Chao* (Latin, Order out of Chaos).
- 97 Kun (Arabic, Be!) Allāh's (SWT) Order for anything to exist, to be.
- 98 Kun Faya Kun (كُنْ فَيَكُونُ): Be and it is! http://www.islamfrominside.com/Pages/Articles/Be_and_it_is.html (accessed June 15, 2017).
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