

# Selenocentrism and Heliocentrism in Early Modern Persianate Imperial Cultures: ‘Alī versus Jesus, with Hermes Presiding

## *A Harranian Essay in Astro-Decoloniality*

MATTHEW MELVIN-KOUSHKI

*University of South Carolina*

### Abstract

*Islam, as all moderns know, is the religion of the Moon. Yet it has been experienced as equally Solar (and Venusian) since late antiquity, thanks to its Iranian-Egyptian-Greek-Roman imperial Heliocentrist genetics. By the same genetic token, the Sun-supremacism that is colonialist-Orientalist Eurocentricism merely continues Latin Christian Jesuan Heliocentrism—a theological rite that, painfully ironically, remains the textbook touchstone of modern Western rationality; meanwhile non-Latin Christian but equally Western philosophical, scientific, technological, and imperial genealogies of both Moon and Sun continue to be actively unmapped.*

*As astro-decolonial remedy, I propose Selenocentrism and Heliocentrism as a primary binary pair whose creative tension helped shape human cultures generally and Islamicate ones specifically, and early modern Persianate imperial cultures above all: for they saw the apotheosis of the peculiarly Islamic embrace of Harranian-Hermetic astral magic as the preferred vehicle of Neoplatonic philosophical-theurgic practice, rejecting the weird Greek insistence on Moon as nonimperial female only in favor of the Harranian devotion to male Moon as Cosmic King and brother to male-female Hermes. The Islamic marriage of Avicennan Moon-ascent to Suhrawardian Sun-ascent that defined the post-Mongol era was emblemized by a new, also peculiarly Islamic Trinity—Muḥammad-‘Alī-Fāṭima as Sun-Moon-Venus—used talismanically by Sunni and Shi‘i alike, as well as the curiously Joycean association of Moon and Mercury in Arabo-Persian grimoires and imperial horoscopes. And as in any Space Race, imperial astro-theurgic politics became pitched with the approach of the Islamic Millennium. Thus was Timurid, Safavid, and ‘Adilshahid Selenocentrism, starring ‘Alī as Moon, countered by Mughal and Ottoman Heliocentrism, starring Jesus as Sun—both on the basis of Ibn ‘Arabī’s cosmic-imperial doctrine of sacral power (walāya) and Pythagorean fusion of the Names and the Planets.*

*This astro-history of Islam, the Greater West, has since been garbled to the point of illegibility. Its political association today solely with the Crescent Moon (per many state and territorial flags) has little to do with the Islamic Lunar calendar, but is rather an artifact of the Latin Christian obsession with the Ottomans—who claimed Jesus as Sun but increasingly also ‘Alī as Moon in their contest with the Safavids and Mughals—as Selenocentric Oriental Saracens, horrified by their self-identification as European Jesuan Heliocentrists too. As such, “the West and the Rest” colonial fable is not merely historicidal and genocidal, but also a weirdly aberrant (gharīb) form of the Moon-Sun Dance ubiquitous across human cultures in its dysfunctional relationship with the Moon. I therefore further propose Islamic Neopaganism as a Hermetic partycrashing trick for showing up the reflexive modern historiographical reduction of Science to strictly male Heliocentrism (think the “Scientific Revolution”) and Religion to strictly female Selenocentrism (think Islam and Wicca). Remarrying active-passive Solar “West” to passive-active Lunar “Not-West” by means of Consort-Warrior Venus and Trickster-Psychopomp Mercury is a more historiographically empirical means of decolonially Drawing Down the Panopticon Moon.*

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## Star Wars

denied night's face  
 have shadowless they?  
 i bring you peace  
 the moon of day<sup>1</sup>

—E. E. CUMMINGS

So great is the empire of the moon over the terraqueous globe.<sup>2</sup>

—RICHARD MEAD

Propaganda aside, modern imperial Enlightenment imitates premodern imperial Enchantment in its contest for the Moon as military base and Panopticon.<sup>3</sup> In a pagan Roman mythological irony much celebrated since, the Soviet-American Space Race, emblem of the twentieth century, pitted the Moon goddess Luna (Soviet) against the Sun god Apollo (American). Despite this “cosmic confusion,” both missions achieved scientific firsts in technologically wondrous ways that continue to define imperial imaginations today. The planned joint Chinese-Russian Moon Base now contends with the new, more appropriately and more menacingly named American Artemis mission, whose red-swooped sigil arrows from the Moon to Mars as a declaration of cosmic war; and India’s Chandrayaan (Moongodcraft) program has just resulted in humanity’s first soft landing on the Lunar south pole, with more Russian Luna and Chinese Chang’e (Moon goddess) missions following.<sup>4</sup> Do the goddesses and gods of old still desire us to ascend to the spheres of Moon and Sun (and Mars) to achieve total Empire?

In science fiction and science fact alike, the Moon is both ultimate military high ground and gateway to the cosmos, with astrolatrous names corresponding. Above all, it is the Watchtower and the High Castle, the dread Archangel surveilling and judging the deeds of all denizens of Earth.<sup>5</sup> The 1968 American Apollo 8 image of Lunar “Earthrise” was a talisman so potent that it birthed everything from the modern environmental movement to Star Wars—both the film franchise and the military program. It continues to grow in power as model of total techno-military Enlightenment at a breakneck pace: for it proved the possibility of a Panopticon beyond Foucault’s wildest dreams.<sup>6</sup>

1. *Complete Poems 1904–1962*, ed. George James Firmage (New York: Liveright, 1994), 527.

2. *A Treatise Concerning the Influence of the Sun and Moon upon Human Bodies, and the Diseases Thereby Produced*, trans. Thomas Stack (London: J. Brindley, 1748), 83. That Mead (d. 1754) was a Fellow of the Royal Society and celebrated court physician is salient to this study’s comparative theme.

3. For theoretical context, see Jason Ā. Josephson-Storm, *The Myth of Disenchantment: Magic, Modernity and the Birth of the Human Sciences* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017).

4. See NASA’s site on [the Artemis mission](#). A retort to Elon Musk’s designs on Mars, Jeff Bezos’s Blue Moon lander is an important component of this mission.

5. The quest for Lunar total surveillance and control is naturally a recurrent theme in sci-fi, especially of the dystopian variety, with frequent comparisons to the Chinese and American Skynets. See also “Arkangel,” *Black Mirror*, season 4, episode 2 (December 29, 2017).

6. NASA’s official talismanic image is [here](#); Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*

But this Space Race is nothing new. Marrying Pythagoras, Plato, and Alexander the Great, the will to ascend to the planetary spheres as a magical means to control and reshape Earth runs like a red thread through Western (Helleno-Judeo-Christo-Islamic) intellectual and imperial history from late antiquity onward. And this Pythagorean-Platonic theme of theurgic ascent-and-descent as engine of Alexandrian universal empire was nowhere more explicitly ideologically and materially realized than in the vast early modern Persianate world, whose post-Mongol empires (particularly Timurid, Aqqyunlu, Safavid, Mughal, and Ottoman), encompassing a full third of the human race, competed for Panopticonic sovereignty over the stars and spacetime itself—through the Moon and the Sun as twin celestial Eyes and engines of Enlightenment.<sup>7</sup>

I propose *Selenocentrism* and *Heliocentrism* as a primary binary pair whose creative tension helped shape early modern Persianate imperial cultures in particular, while also serving as a key to the history of Western philosophy, science, technology, and empire as a whole.<sup>8</sup> Yet modern historiography remains almost totally blind to this world-historical cultural tension despite its obvious ubiquity in the surviving textual, artifactual, and architectural record of these cultures (among many others). This blindness is of course a classic symptom of the still-pandemical mind virus that is European colonialist-Orientalist chauvinism, heart of the modern constitution. More specifically, however, it is weirdly reminiscent of Christianity's origins as an anti-astrolatry cult, which decried Moon worship specifically as emblem of "paganism" (the term is a Christian slur)—best combated by the astrolatrous worship of Christ as Sol Invictus and Sun of Righteousness, whose cosmocratic role as Central Fire is to consume the Earth and all the planets and end time itself.<sup>9</sup> As heir to this Christian bad-faith Heliocentrism, heir in turn of ancient Iranian-Egyptian-Greek-Roman Heliocentric imperialism, modern historiographical Eurocentrism comes off as a barely disguised form of Sun worship taken to an unbalanced, solipsistic, Center-of-the-Universe polemical extreme.<sup>10</sup>

So it is that Heliocentrism alone has come to serve in the current historiography of science as sigil of Progress and symbol of the West *versus* the Rest. It is the core of the

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(New York: Vintage Books, 1995).

7. Gregory Shaw, *Hellenic Tantra: The Theurgic Platonism of Iamblichus* (New York: Angelico Press, 2024); Matthew Melvin-Koushki, "Mīr Dāmād's *On Doffing*: Safavid Philosophy, Ritual Magic and Out-of-Body Experience," in *De la lettre à l'esprit / From the Letter to the Spirit: Studies in Honour of Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi*, ed. Orkhan Mir-Kasimov and Mathieu Terrier, 2 vols, 2:779-818. (Turnhout: Brepols, 2025).

8. In Greek mythology, Selene is the sister of Helios, both Titans, representing Moon and Sun respectively; they were later conflated with Roman Luna and Sol.

9. Needless to say, the original Pythagorean concept of the Central Fire does not refer to the visible Sun, but to the nonvisible Source and Axis of all. As I argue, however, the renaissance of Pythagoreanism that characterizes Western early modernities—including Islamicate ones—was a major driver of the Heliocentric turns discussed here, which featured their symbolic, physical, and metaphysical conflation.

10. See also Wouter J. Hanegraaff, *Hermetic Spirituality and the Historical Imagination: Altered States of Knowledge in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022). His concept of "internal Eurocentrism" is particularly salient here.

story of “The Scientific Revolution,” wrought by a handful of Christian occult scientists from Copernicus to Newton—a catechism that magically transmogrifies this tiny coterie of western European men into the only Pythagoreans in human history due worship as fathers of the new Central Fire that is Western Scientific Modernity. And so it is that Islam, historically the Greater West, must be magically transmogrified into an unknowably alien Moon Religion of the East—whence its political symbolism today, and almost total erasure from the history of science—to bring pleasing dramatic balance to this otherwise wildly imbalanced story.<sup>11</sup>

(And since economies are stories too: the current war-driven, historically extreme 90:1 price ratio of Lunar silver to Solar gold—despite silver’s far greater, Hermetically dual usefulness as currency and techno-industrial metal, and favored economic status over gold in a host of human cultures globally for the last few millennia, including Islamic ones—is another Euro-American Heliocentrist case in point.)

Although wonderfully effective as an imperial ideology, our modern master narrative of male Solar West vanquishing female Lunar East is both violently anti-historical and painfully parochial in its acting out of this peculiarly Christian quirk. It is also anti-empirical. That Moon and Sun have been intimate dance partners in human cultures globally from antiquity to the present—sharing, swapping, and/or changing divine genders in the process—is due to the simple if astronomically shocking fact that, observationally, the Lunar and Solar discs are precisely the same size and cycle at precisely the right rate as to make their regular mutual eclipses possible, thereby teaching us terrestrials the cyclical nature of time and empire.<sup>12</sup> (This is why, astrologically, total Solar eclipses portend the fall of states; the most portentous recent ones were the Great American Eclipses of 2017 and 2024, whose paths of totality ominously marked an X across the United States.) Weirder still is the fact that Earth’s Moon is both massively larger than every other satellite relative to its planet

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11. Thoroughly representative is Andrew Ede and Lesley Cormack’s *A History of Science in Society: From Philosophy to Utility* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2022), a widely used textbook now in its fourth edition. It explicitly and very briefly treats “classical” Islam as an appurtenance of Byzantium in chapter 2, then spends the remaining eleven chapters charting the inexorable ascent to supremacy of western European and then Euro-American True Science. Virtually all textbooks in this field since its emergence a century ago follow the same wildly anti-historical and colonialist-Orientalist logic, most equally explicitly, a few accidentally, due to the almost total erasure of Islam as Religion from Science. See Matthew Melvin-Koushki, “An Islamic Scientific Revolution? Early Modern Occult Science, Cosmic Philology and the Weird,” in “Current Debates and Emerging Trends in the History of Science in Premodern Islamicate Societies,” ed. Justin Stearns and Nahyan Fancy, special roundtable, *History of Science* 61, no. 2 (2023): 166–72. On Islam as the Greater West, see idem, “*Taḥqīq* and *Taqīd* in the Renaissances of Western Early Modernity,” *Philological Encounters* 3, nos. 1–2 (2018): 193–249; Wouter J. Hanegraaff, *Esotericism in Western Culture: Counter-Normativity and Rejected Knowledge* (London: Bloomsbury, 2025).

12. This has been a basic feature of astrology since its Sumerian-Babylonian invention; despite modern historiographical fawning, the theory of cyclical time driving the rise and fall of states was hardly invented by the anti-occultist reactionary polemicist Ibn Khaldūn (d. 1406), whose crude, simplistic attempt to displace astrology was universally panned. See Matthew Melvin-Koushki, “Imperial Talismanic Love: Ibn Turka’s *Debate of Feast and Fight* (1426) as Philosophical Romance and Lettrist Mirror for Timurid Princes,” *Der Islam* 96, no. 1 (2019): 42–86.

in our Solar system (27 percent of Earth's diameter) and so perfectly placed, orbitally circular, and gravitationally powerful as to make our species's experience of the Sun-Moon relationship not only locally unique, but galactically vanishingly rare: Lunar satellite as UFO, psychopomp to the Beyond. Little wonder, then, that humans have looked to their celestial binary dance to define the parameters of religion, science, and empire for at least four millennia—and continue to do so today.

But science, unlike empire, enforces (ideally) a religious humility and wonder. Modern astrophysicists—as ascent-obsessed as any Neoplatonist—have calculated the existence of an unthinkable number of Solar and Lunar systems just in our visible, infinitesimal sector of the almost totally nonvisible (“dark,” i.e., occult) and infinite or infinitely expanding universe (multiverse?), through launching artificial Occult Eyes in the Sky.<sup>13</sup> More vertiginous still is the likely existence of Black Holes as the gravitational center of most or all known galaxies, based on direct observation of the one at the center of our own; the corresponding existence of White Holes, Gray Holes, and mediating Wormholes are currently hypothesized as mathematical solutions to the Black Hole information paradox. But *we have never been modern*: these neologisms and this paradox are weirdly reminiscent of the Pythagorean concept of the Central Fire, the One Light of consciousness that is the source of all existence but itself remains eternally empirically Occult.<sup>14</sup> In the cause of empiricism, then, we must remember that human Heliocentrism historically were and are just as cosmologically cramped and locally determined as Geocentrism and hence not particularly more Progressive or True. Historians too would do well to wonder more, to adopt the awesome Brunonian doctrine of infinite worlds, to radically relativize and localize the world stories we tell.

I therefore present *Islamic* Heliocentrism as another local but equally epochal historical phenomenon—one always paired with *Selenocentrism* for a more natural balance. Acknowledging this simple fact provides a perspectivist salve for the blistering Sunburn that is Eurocentrism by disrupting the colonialist-Orientalist narrative at its core. (A Solar-Lunar gender war is implicit in the classic Saidian account of the European feminization of the Dark East and her insemination with Light by the Bright West; but postcolonial scholarship has yet to register that the epithet “Orient”—literally “Sunrising”—is painfully ironically anti-Moon, much less explicitly pursue *astro-decoloniality* of the kind essayed here.<sup>15</sup>) To that therapeutic end, I offer a preliminary survey of this Selenocentrism-Heliocentrism binary from its ninth-century beginnings to its early modern Persianate imperial apotheoses as a more balanced, empirical framework for intra-Western and global comparative study.

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13. It bears noting that satellite surveillance—i.e., spying on the nonvisible spectrum, especially short-wave infrared—is quite literally an *occult* technology according to early modern epistemologies; see Matthew Melvin-Koushki, “Is (Islamic) Occult Science Science?,” *Theology and Science* 18, no. 2 (2020): 303–24.

14. Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993).

15. That the ancient eastern Iranian province of *Khurāsān* (also “Sunrising”) testifies to the same imperial Heliocentrist impulse only compounds this colonialist-Orientalist irony in a Persianate context.

### Moon and Sun as Ultimate Islamic Philosophical-Imperial Pair

and it's you are whatever a moon has always meant  
and whatever a sun will always sing is you<sup>16</sup>

—E. E. CUMMINGS

If you wish to see Him, think on the Sun, think on the course of the Moon, think on  
the order of the stars.<sup>17</sup>

—CORPUS HERMETICUM I

Genetic siblings, Islamic cultures naturally shared with Christian ones a powerful Heliocentric impulse.<sup>18</sup> But epigenetics, like geography, is often destiny too: so it was that they came to radically disagree about the Moon.

Islamdom's centers of gravity in both Iran and the eastern Mediterranean attuned its denizens to ancient Iranian-Egyptian-Greek-Roman Heliocentrism as expression of empire; Alexander the Great as specifically Solar conqueror of West and East and Lord of Conjunction (*ṣāhib-qirān*) accordingly became an ultimate symbol of Islamic imperialism to a far greater degree than Christian, given the tininess and relative insularity of post-Roman European states until the eighteenth century.<sup>19</sup> By the same Alexandrian token, Islamic philosophy grew up to be markedly more Neoplatonic than its Christian counterpart. The former was fueled by the great Greek/Syriac-Arabic translation movement at its origin, which achieved the successful marriage of Plato and Aristotle via Pythagoras, Hermes, and Plotinus, celebrated as the philosophical magic that made Alexander's world conquest possible; the later Arabic-Latin one that defined the latter was much more limited in scope and volume, with frequent censorship and garbling, and skewing in favor of Aristotle as less of a theological threat.<sup>20</sup> The impulse in modern scholarship to downgrade Islamic Neoplatonism from philosophy to "mysticism" while upgrading Christian Aristotelianism to proto-science is just another retelling of the Solar West *versus* Lunar East colonialist-Orientalist—*Sunrisingist*—fable.

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16. *Complete Poems 1904–1962*, 766.

17. *Poimandres* 5.3, translated in Tamara M. Green, *City of the Moon God: Religious Traditions of Harran* (Leiden: Brill, 1992), 86.

18. Richard Bulliet, *The Case for Islamo-Christian Civilization* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004); Garth Fowden, *Before and After Muhammad: The First Millennium Refocused* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014). Judaism, like Islam, was historically more Moon-Sun balanced, as epitomized by its Lunisolar calendar.

19. For references, see Matthew Melvin-Koushki, "Early Modern Islamicate Empire: New Forms of Religiopolitical Legitimacy," in *The Wiley-Blackwell History of Islam*, ed. Armando Salvatore et al., 353–75 (Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 2018).

20. Dimitri Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture: The Graeco-Arabic Translation Movement in Baghdad and Early 'Abbāsīd Society (2nd–4th/9th–10th Centuries)* (London: Routledge, 1998); Dag Nikolaus Hasse, *Success and Suppression: Arabic Sciences and Philosophy in the Renaissance* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016).

For the West is Lunar too. Muslim scholars—here in even sharper contrast to their Christian peers—embraced *Harranian-Hermetic astral magic* as a primary vehicle of philosophical-imperial practice. This embrace was inspired in the first place by the quranic imprimatur for Sabianism as a legitimate monotheistic path to the Overworld. Yet everyone knew the Sabian capital, Harran, to be the world’s preeminent Temple to Sīn/Nanna, the ancient Mesopotamian Moon God, King of the Cosmos.<sup>21</sup> In its Islamic scholarly reception, Harran likewise became the capital of Hermetic science, which became in turn a primary engine of Islamic occultism—whence the close correlation of the Moon and Mercury/Hermes in Islamic sources (but not in Christian ones) from the tenth century onward.<sup>22</sup> This confluence of Harranian-Hermetic Moon worship with various local forms of Arabian devotion to the same—whence Islam’s Lunar calendar—would seem to be the genesis of Islamic Selenocentrism as an equally potent mode of science and empire.

Such late antique genetic and epigenetic programming guaranteed that Moon and Sun would be married too under the banner of Islam. An extremely brief, programmatic account of some of the major exponents and stages of that evolving marriage follows, as a preliminary framework for further research; similar examples are sure to be myriad.

The emergence of a specifically Islamic Selenocentrism-Heliocentrism binary was signaled already in the ninth century, when the “extremist” Nuṣayrīs began to pair Muḥammad as Sun with ‘Alī as Moon in their Shi‘ī riffs on the Christian-Pythagorean cosmic Trinity—with the Moon, avatar of the Divine, being superior to his cousin the Sun.<sup>23</sup> The thoroughgoing Pythagorean and encyclopedic Brethren of Purity of the tenth century, taking a more strictly astro-magical and alchemical stance, held up both Sun (gold) and Moon (silver) as occult, Mercurian (quicksilver) keys to the cosmos, Alexandrian empire, and (trans)human evolution alike. Ibn Sīnā (d. 1037), the second Aristotle, rather emphasized the Moon as Active Intellect, and hence staging point for all prophets and philosophers in their astral ascent (*mi‘rāj*) up the Chain of Being. Father of Enlightenment

21. See Q 2:62, 5:69, 22:17; Green, *City of the Moon God*; Thorkild Jacobsen, *Treasures of Darkness: A History of Mesopotamian Religion* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1976). For medieval Islamic visual receptions, see Anna Caiozzo, “Astrological Images as the Key to the Cosmology of the Medieval Islamic World,” in *Imagining the Heavens Across Eurasia from Antiquity to Early Modernity*, ed. Rana Brentjes, Sonja Brentjes, and Stamatina Mastorakou, 259–76 ([Milan]: Mimesis International, 2024).

22. Kevin van Bladel, *The Arabic Hermes: From Pagan Sage to Prophet of Science* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); John Walbridge, *The Wisdom of the Mystic East: Suhrawardī and Platonic Orientalism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001), 38. Idrīs/Enoch was increasingly associated with Hermes too as the inventor of various occult sciences. Here the most influential source is already Abū Ma‘shar (d. 886), who has Cancer, sign of the Moon, as strictly female, but the Moon him-/herself as Hermetically ambiguous, simultaneously associated with kingship, women, and trickery. See *The Abbreviation of the Introduction to Astrology*, ed. and trans. Charles Burnett, Keiji Yamamoto, and Michio Yano (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 17, 67; and the discussion on the *Ghāyat al-ḥakīm* and *Picatrix* below.

23. Needless to say, this Nuṣayrī Trinity was in no way formalized like the Christian one, with different surviving texts taking often sharply different approaches; anti-Nuṣayrī polemics and persecution over the last millennium have further obfuscated and distorted the already deeply esoteric doctrinal picture(s). This Sun/Moon binary association is thus not particularly consistent either; that it does appear so early on is, however, suggestive. My thanks to Mushegh Asatryan for this observation; see his *Controversies in Formative Shi‘ī Islam: The Ghulat Muslims and Their Beliefs* (London: I.B. Tauris and Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2017).

(*Ishrāqī*) philosophy, Suhrawardī (d. 1191) reworked Avicennan Aristotelianism in more Solar, Platonic-Pythagorean terms: the Central Fire as *nous* is the ultimate goal of gnostic ascent back to the One. Challengers like Fakhr al-Dīn Rāzī (d. 1209) influentially refocused the Aristotelian-Enlightenment debate on Sabian-Harranian astral magic, with an emphasis on philosophical perfection and union with one's Perfect Nature (*ṭibā' tām*) through the progressive ritual embodiment of planetary opposites, and again giving ritual pride of place to the Moon.<sup>24</sup> Ibn 'Arabī (d. 1240), Supreme Master, then erected what is history's most sociopolitically influential Platonic-Pythagorean cosmic hierarchy to date, which identified prophethood (*nubuwwa*) with Muḥammad and sainthood (*walāya*, sacral power) with Jesus, not 'Alī, controversially if ambiguously elevating sainthood over prophethood—a theory that in later reworkings did much to define the Sun-Moon (and Mercury) relationship.<sup>25</sup>

The Mongol conquest and Black Death changed everything: their combined universal chaos inspired radically new-old philosophical-scientific syntheses that would help bring order to the early modern Persianate imperial era and give rise to what I call the Occult-Scientific Revolution.<sup>26</sup> That most infamous of Twelver Shi'ī divines, Rajab al-Bursī (d. 1411) accordingly combined Ibn 'Arabian theory with Būnian magic to propose a Sun-Moon/Muḥammad-'Alī binary as the primordial quranic Twin Luminaries (*nayyirayn*), a cosmic and hence literally *talismanic* pair.<sup>27</sup> (By contrast, al-Būṣīrī's (d. 1294) universally beloved "Ode of the Mantle," equally talismanic, had exalted Muḥammad alone as both Sun and Moon.<sup>28</sup>) He appears to have been inspired in this synthesis, emphatically lettrist, through contact with the New Brethren of Purity of Egypt, Iran, and Anatolia, Ibn Turka (d. 1432) chief among them. Foremost occult philosopher of Timurid Empire, the Isfahani Sunni sage is responsible for the systematization of lettrism (*ʿilm al-ḥurūf*) as universal Pythagorean imperial science and technology; he followed Ibn 'Arabī in glorifying Jesus (*ʿĪsā*), Word of

24. Michael-Sebastian Noble, *Philosophising the Occult: Avicennan Psychology and 'The Hidden Secret' of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2021). That Moon magic in particular makes kings slaves and slaves kings (274) was highly salient for early modern Persianate intellectual-imperial culture and the emergence in the sixteenth century of what I anachronistically call "occult democracy"; see Matthew Melvin-Koushki, "The Occult Court: 'Alī Ṣaffī's *Boon for the Khan* (1522) as Timurid-Safavid Manual of Boozing and Battling Magic and Marker of Early Modernity," in "The Religious Cultures of Premodern Islamicate Courts in Transregional Perspective," ed. Christian Mauder, special issue, *Al-Masāq* 37, no. 1 (2025), forthcoming.

25. Alexander D. Knysh, *Ibn 'Arabi in the Later Islamic Tradition: The Making of a Polemical Image in Medieval Islam* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999). That in the *Futūḥāt*'s thoroughly lettrist chapter 198 he assigns, uniquely, Jesus as the Word of God (*kalimat Allāh*) and All-Numberer (*al-Muḥṣī*) to the sphere of Mercury is likewise quite Hermetic-Pythagorean; see Matthew Melvin-Koushki, "Lettrism, Astrology and Jazz Philosophy in Ibn 'Arabī's *Allusions of the Quran in the World of Man*," *Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi Society* 73 (2023): 53–75.

26. Melvin-Koushki, "An Islamic Scientific Revolution?"

27. Idem, "Safavid Twelver Lettrism between Sunnism and Shi'ism, Mysticism and Science: Rajab al-Bursī vs. Maḥmūd Dihdār," in "Decolonising Islamic Intellectual History: Perspectives from Shi'ī Thought," ed. Sajjad Rizvi and Ahab Bdaiwi, special issue, *Global Intellectual History* 9, no. 5 (2024): 603–40.

28. *Qaṣīdat al-Burda*, ll. 49–56. Shah Ismā'īl I (r. 1501–34), founding Safavid dynast, exalted 'Alī instead as Moon and Sun in one; see Mohammad Amin Mansouri, "The Greatest Name of God: 'Alī ibn Abi Ṭālib as a Cosmic Image in Rajab al-Bursī's *Mashāriq al-anwār*," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 3 (2024): 1–24.

God and Mercurian Perfect Man, as cosmic mage—but glorified ‘Alī as Lunar *Pythagoras redivivus* more, replacing Jesus as ultimate Saint and Scientist of Empire. Definitively marrying lettrism to astrology as twin technologies of time, he likewise rewrote Amir Temūr as quranic Lord of Conjunction and Moon conqueror of the world in epochal balance with Alexander’s Sun.<sup>29</sup>

Reprising the Bursian and Ibn Turkian models in support of Safavid imperial legitimacy, Maḥmūd Dihdār Shīrāzī (fl. 1576), the most prolific Persian author on applied, Būnian lettrism of the sixteenth century, proved by lettrist means Muḥammad’s cosmic identity with the Sun and ‘Alī’s with the Moon—with an Akbarian twist: the Moon that is sainthood is superior to the Sun that is prophethood, especially for the purposes of empire.<sup>30</sup> Meanwhile, the anarchic Nuḡṭavīs (Dottists), a materialist-reincarnationist offshoot of the Ḥurūfīs that gave the New Brethren such a headache, argued instead for Muḥammad as Moon and their founder, Maḥmūd Pasīkhānī (d. 1428), as Sun—a playfully blasphemous reversal that would enjoy traction not in Safavid Iran but in Mughal India.<sup>31</sup> Mīr Dāmād (d. 1631), Chief Jurisconsult and foremost philosopher of the Safavid Empire, then synthesized and metabolized all these symbologies of Light within a New Brethren astro-lettrist framework to create a new imperial philosophy of *metatime*. A committed Twelver *Ishrāqī*—his penname, ostentatiously, was in fact “Ishrāq”—he rewrote Platonic-Pythagorean Enlightenment in terms equally Solar (Muḥammad) and Lunar (‘Alī): with Suhrawardī, he glorified the Sun as *nous* and window onto the One; with Ibn Sīnā, he practiced theurgic ascent to the Moon as out-of-body vantage for the mapping and surveillance of the cosmos.<sup>32</sup>

This Selenocentric-Heliocentric Enlightenment came to pervade the vast Persianate world as universalist imperial ethos during the competition for the Islamic Millennium (1592)—an epochal moment that made heaven-straining astro-lettrist science both politically and technologically the name of the great game: Space Race.<sup>33</sup>

From the eastern Mediterranean to India, this cultural continuity was ironically ensured by the military and economic weakness of the Safavid state relative to its much larger

29. See, e.g., Matthew Melvin-Koushki, “The New Brethren of Purity: Ibn Turka and the Renaissance of Pythagoreanism in the Early Modern Persian Cosmopolis,” *Intellectual History of the Islamicate World* 13, no. 3 (2025), forthcoming; Kazuo Morimoto, “An Enigmatic Genealogical Chart of the Timurids: A Testimony to the Dynasty’s Claim to Yasavi-‘Alid Legitimacy?,” *Oriens* 44 (2016): 145–78. Ibn ‘Arabī, in classic jazz-philosophical contrast, associates the Moon rather with Adam, and following him Bursī; see Mansouri, “The Greatest Name of God.”

30. Matthew Melvin-Koushki, “Occult Ecumenism: Maḥmūd Dihdār Shīrāzī’s *Unveiling Secrets* as Exemplar of Timurid-Safavid Sunni-Shi‘i Science,” *Iranian Studies* 55, nos. 5–6 (2022): 1–31.

31. See, e.g., Ṣādiq Kiyā, *Nuḡṭaviyān yā Pasīkhāniyān* (Tehran: Asātīr, 1392sh/2013); Kathryn Babayan, *Mystics, Monarchs, and Messiahs: Cultural Landscapes of Early Modern Iran* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002).

32. Łukasz Piątak, “Between Philosophy, Mysticism and Magic: A Critical Edition of Occult Writings of and Attributed to Shihāb al-Dīn al-Suhrawardī (1156–1191)” (PhD diss., University of Warsaw, 2018); Melvin-Koushki, “Mīr Dāmād’s *On Doffing*”; idem, “World as (Arabic) Text: Mīr Dāmād and the Neopythagoreanization of Philosophy in Safavid Iran,” *Studia Islamica* 114, no. 3 (2019): 378–431.

33. See Azfar Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign: Sacred Kingship and Sainthood in Islam* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012).

Mughal and Ottoman rivals; Shah Ismā‘īl’s conquest of Timurid-Aqqyunlu Iran as avatar of ‘Alī and the Qizilbash chaos that followed drove a brain drain that ensconced the writings and students of these and other Luminaries (including the Aqqyunlu-imperialist lettrist Enlightenment philosopher Davānī (d. 1503)) at Mughal, Ottoman, and other Persianate courts.<sup>34</sup> The Philosophy of Light was accordingly translated into architecture and urban design too. From Agra to Isfahan to Istanbul, new mosques, mausoleums, and palaces were built as talismanic Spaceships; and Isfahan as a whole was revolutionarily redesigned as a Solomonic-Hermetic Pythagoropolis, both Panacea and Panopticon.<sup>35</sup>

At the same time, it was the Safavid scholarly diaspora in the rival Mughal and Ottoman realms that forced this venerable Islamic Selenocentric-Heliocentric tension to its early modern imperial apotheoses. Safavid, Mughal, Ottoman: all three states ideologically and technologically embraced Ibn ‘Arabī’s theory of sacral power as cosmic empire, each claiming Center of the Universe (*qutb al-aqtāb*) status in classic Mongol Sky-worshipping fashion. Following lettrists like Ibn Turka, Davānī, and Dihdār, all agreed on ‘Alī as Moon as source of Sainthood and Science and avidly pursued the occult sciences in an Alexandrian-‘Alid mode. But the Safavid embrace of ‘Alid Selenocentrism—philosophically, ideologically, technologically, and material-culturally—provoked dramatic Mughal and Ottoman Heliocentric reactions: to a far more consequential degree than any contemporary Christian power, and citing Ibn ‘Arabī and Suhrawardī, both empires embraced Jesus as Sol Invictus, Roman model of Cosmic Kingship.

Naturally, Ottoman Jesuan Heliocentrism was mostly Mediterranean and apocalyptic in tenor—hence their claim to be both New Rome and the last empire in world history, host to Jesus at the End of Time. It was also mostly confined to state ideology, rather than state technology; and from the late seventeenth century onward, Ottoman political iconography became increasingly ‘Alid and Selenocentric, partly in response to the Latin Christian obsession with associating Islam with the Moon. In sharp contrast, its Mughal counterpart was equally millenarian but strictly anti-apocalyptic, and reincarnationist in classic Pythagorean-Platonic Enlightenment style. The Mughal emperor became avatar of Jesus as Son of God, himself an avatar of the Light millennially incarnating to bring imperial order to the chaos that is the world—a radical yet perfectly post-Mongol Persianate political theology that horrified the Jesuit missionaries at court. (Akbar did enjoy making them

34. Sajjad H. Rizvi, “Mīr Dāmād in India: Islamic Philosophical Traditions and the Problem of Creation,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 131, no. 1 (2011): 9–23; 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, 232–43 (Washington: Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, 2009); Matthew Melvin-Koushki, “The Occult Sciences in Safavid Iran and Safavid Occult Scientists Abroad,” in *The Safavid World*, ed. Rudi Matthee, 403–27 (New York: Routledge, 2021).

35. Melvin-Koushki, “Mīr Dāmād’s *On Doffing*”; Farshid Emami, *Isfahan: Architecture and Urban Experience in Early Modern Iran* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2024). The prototypical Pythagorean-Iamblichean Spaceship is of course the sixth-century Hagia Sophia, that most wondrous of Byzantine churches: expressly astrologically designed to embody and induce the Ascent procedure laid out in Plato’s *Timaeus* both visually and aurally, it became model in turn for Ottoman mosque architecture in particular. See Peter Mark Adams, *Hagia Sophia / Sanctum of Kronos: Spiritual Dissent in an Age of Tyranny* (London: Scarlet Imprint, 2023).

squirm.) But it was a political technology too: it made Mughal court ritual quite literally talismanic. Astral-magical operations were performed daily to achieve theurgic ascent-and-descent; and in Humāyūn’s palace Talisman House (*khāna-yi ṭilism*), members of court physically orbited the Emperor as Sun, his alchemical, panacean body Hermetically marrying Above to Below, Occult to Manifest, and West to East to heal all beings on Earth (*ṣulḥ-i kull*).<sup>36</sup> Expressly occult-scientific, and consciously responding to both Safavid and Latin Christian contemporary developments, this revolutionary new-old form of Western imperial Heliocentrism belongs to the story of the Scientific Revolution too, whereby Moderns embraced the magic of the Ancients in their quest to conquer the stars—the better to control the Earth.<sup>37</sup>



Fig. 1. The Tāj Maḥall as Solar (also Lunar?) spaceship, with Moonlight Garden (Mahtāb Bāgh) opposite across the Yamuna River as ideal observation point (MarcBW).

36. Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign*; Ebba Koch, *The Planetary King: Humayun Padshah, Inventor and Visionary on the Mughal Throne* (Ahmedabad: Mapin, 2022); Daniel J. Sheffield, “Exercises in Peace: Āzar Kayvānī Universalism and Comparison in the *School of Doctrines*,” *Modern Asian Studies* 56 (2022): 959–92. Modern history of science polemics, in their zeal to outlaw astrology as proof of Oriental degeneracy, ignore the basic point that in the standard premodern Western Geocentric model the Sun occupies the fourth and Central sphere mediating between the three outer, world-historical planets (Mars, Jupiter, Saturn) and the three inner, personal ones (Moon, Mercury, Venus), thereby constellating another cosmic-Hermetic Above and Below—precisely the model that authorized Mughal imperial Heliocentrism.

37. The enduringly popular story of Shāhjahān’s unrealized plan to build a Black Tāj for himself on the site of Moonlight Garden to mirror the White for Mumtāz as testament to their terrestrial-celestial Love, almost certainly a European invention and taken up by colonial British Romanticism, nevertheless curiously encodes a similar Sun-Moon, Manifest-Occult, Yang-Yin binary as heart of high Persian Pythagorean imperial style. On the history of its local and colonial receptions, see Ebba Koch, *The Complete Taj Mahal and the Riverfront Gardens of Agra* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2006).

### Hermetic Marriages, Tricky Trinities, and the Man in the Moon

Reflexive Christian Heliocentrism, soul of Eurocentrism, has primed historians to accept the colonialist-Orientalist (Sunrisingist) fiction of Islam as alien and female Moon religion only—the centrality of both Moon and Sun to Islamic cosmologies specifically and human experience generally be damned.<sup>38</sup> To understand the stakes of the Moon-Sun dialectic that did so much to define Islamic philosophy and Persianate imperial early modernity, an antidote is needed: per the Harranian-Hermetic rite, we must understand the Moon as a Cosmic King too.

The pat reduction of Moon to female and Sun to male is of unreconstructed European Renaissance Christian provenance, whose anti-“pagan,” anti-Jewish, and anti-Islamic yet paradoxically pro-Greek program was embarrassingly parochial. Yet its insistence on Christ as King Sun, without corresponding Queen Moon, and demotion of Mother Mary to nondivine female, continues to be taken as Western gospel by historians today.<sup>39</sup>

While the Christian iconography of late antiquity was increasingly Heliocentric—the Solar halo being an ancient Iranian import—it became explicitly so in the hands of Italian Renaissance masters like Raphael (d. 1520), consciously operating in a Neoplatonizing, Sun-worshipping mode. And no man was more responsible for constructing that mode than the Florentine sage-philologist Marsilio Ficino (d. 1499), whose translations of the surviving and accessible Platonic, Neoplatonic, and Hermetic corpuses defined the philosophical *prisca sapientia* curriculum of Latin Christendom through the “Scientific Revolution” and European colonial eras, and were a major contemporary impetus for Picoan humanism and Copernican Heliocentrism alike—and modern Yatesian “Hermeticism” too. Like his Islamic Enlightenment contemporaries, he held the Sun as but physical symbol of the metaphysical Occult Sun at the center of being, and Iamblichean astro-theurgical Ascent as the only program for human perfection. Unlike them, he declared the Divine Trinity to be strictly Solar and male, marrying the fecundity of the Father to the illumination of the Son to the heat of the Spirit, on the strength of various threefold and ninefold Pythagorean proofs. The Sun’s triune masculine glory is such that dual Hermes must be reduced to his mere armsbearer—and the Moon to both his sister and his wife, obedient Queen of Heaven.<sup>40</sup>

Of strictly female, singular and so non-Hermetic nature, and paradoxically virginal,

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38. And possibly Neanderthal cosmology too: the earliest dated example of European cave art, made at least 40,800 years ago and likely more, is the large red disk from El Castillo in Calabria, Spain, that context suggests may represent the Full Moon. The earliest *Homo sapiens* cave art likewise prominently features red dots and disks (red being the default pigment for all figures). See A. W. G. Pike et al., “U-Series Dating of Paleolithic Art in 11 Caves in Spain,” *Science* 336 (2012): 1409–13. That both Moon and Sun enjoy grammatical distinction from the planets in various human languages, including Modern English (they alone take the definite article), is likewise suggestive.

39. To be clear, this theology is of course late antique, but modern scholarship looks to “The Renaissance” as origin of the humanities and so cannot imagine alternatives, despite their abundance in the Greater Western historical record. See Melvin-Koushki, “*Taḥqīq and Taqlīd*.”

40. See Ficino’s thoroughlygoingly Greco-astrological treatise *On the Sun (De sole)* (Florence: Antonio Miscomini, 1493), reworked from his *De comparatione solis ad Deum* (1492), chapters 7, 9, and 12 in particular.

*Regina Coeli* was and is the Latin liturgical epithet of Mary as Mother of the Son of God, which by Ficino’s argument implies her status as at least cosmic sister-wife. Yet in both Latin and Greek liturgy and iconography to this day she fails to figure as imperial Moon consort to Sun (despite a few hints in that direction); for anti-“pagan” reasons, Mary can only be a human female physical-metaphysical receptor, facilitator, and adorer—while her superhuman scion King Christ continues to be hailed, “pagan”-style, “O Helios!”<sup>41</sup>

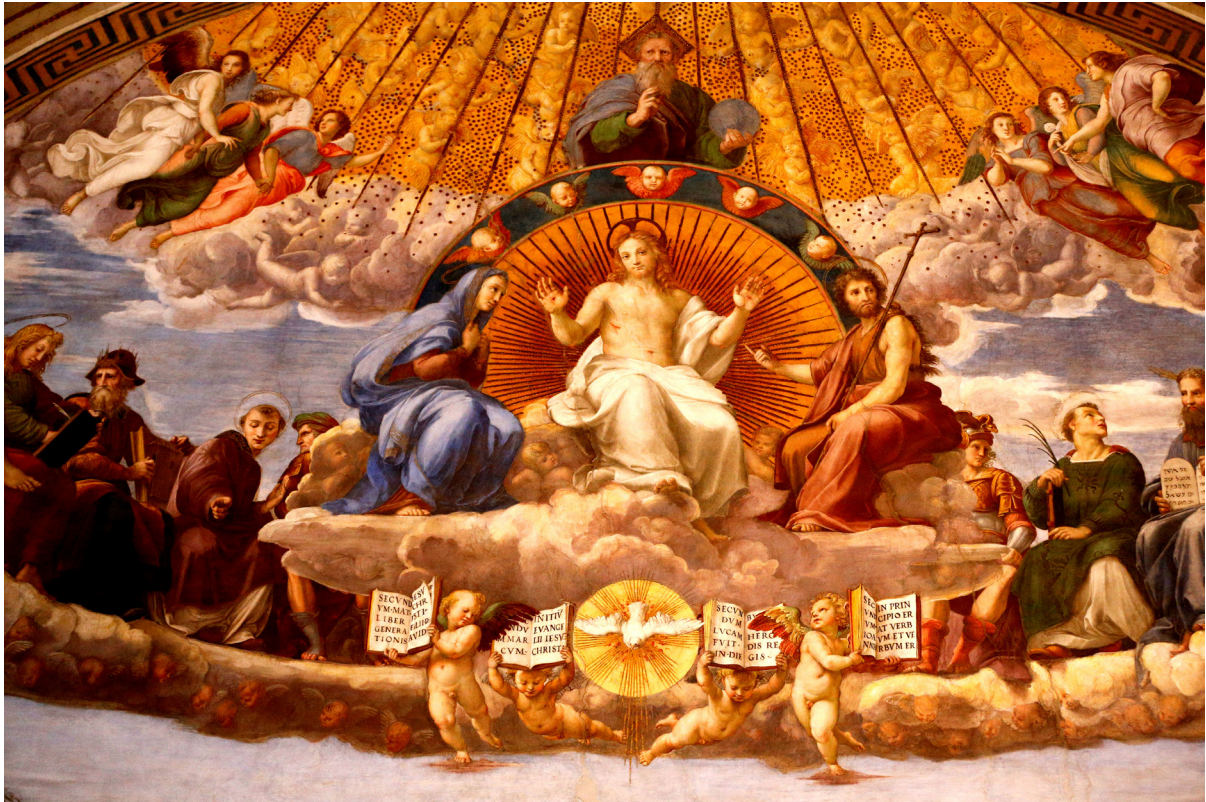


Fig. 2. Raphael, “Disputation of the Holy Sacrament” (1509–10), Vatican Museum, Vatican, Rome, Italy (Godong).

As with all human experience of what we are pleased to call reality, however, planetary persons crossculturally tend to be much more tricky and gender-shifting—like Hermes—in ways that put such parochial stories to bed. And especially the Moon: in a majority of recorded human mythologies, the Lunar body is either a male or Hermaphrodite deity, and the Sun his and/or her sister, brother, and/or mate. That in Arabic Moon (*qamar*) is grammatically masculine and Sun (*shams*) feminine may well be an echo of the South Arabian cults of Almaqah (male) and Shams (female); indeed, that this gender balance is

41. Hence Mary’s depiction as mere supplicant to the Son in Raphael’s famous Vatican fresco, centered on Father-Son-Spirit as an exclusively top-down Solar Trinity. The early Byzantine Sun-Moon imperial relationship is more suggestive, given Constantine’s iconic and ideological status as Helios and his mother Helena’s as Selene; see Sasha Chaitow, “How Pagan Magic Shaped Christian Icons 1: Theurgy and Sacred Image Traditions from Late Paganism to Byzantium,” *Thyrathen: The Lost Bibliothēkē*, June 22, 2025.

historically fairly common makes such an origin likely.<sup>42</sup> In Norse mythology, for example, Máni, the Moon god, is brother of Sól, the Sun goddess, and forever pursued by the Wolf; in Inuit mythology, it is Aningaak or Taqqiq, the Moon, who pursues his sister Malina or Siqiniq, the Sun; in Shinto-Japanese mythology, Tsukuyomi was brother and husband to his sister Amaterasu, Sun goddess and mother of the Japanese imperial line, from whom he became estranged—whence the separation of day and night. (Thematically wonderfully resonant with Islamic Selenocentrism is the literal meaning of Tsukuyomi as “Moon Reading,” likely referring to both timekeeping and Lunar divination practices.<sup>43</sup>) The Moon was and is likewise male in other ritual cultures the world over, from ancient Assyrian to Anatolian to Indic; and in a variety of African and Native American mythologies, among others, Moon and Sun are brothers.<sup>44</sup>

In their insistence on Selene as strictly female, sister to her fellow Titan Helios, along with Artemis, Hecate, and others, the Greeks were weird, joining the Incans and the Javanese as odd men out on the world stage; even the Sun-worshipping Romans balanced Luna with Lunus. It must be a trick of Fate, then, that this Greek weirdness was poorly translated into the Christian weirdness that is Heliocentrism without a balancing Selenocentrism. But it does much to explain the birth of the modern constitution: from Ficino’s strictly male Trinity—featuring three Suns but no Moon—to the modern colonialist-Orientalist (Sunrisingist) sadomasochistic fantasy of a passive “non-West”—a female Moon, and with her a Mother Earth, fit only for imperial-industrial subjugation—seems but a few slippery steps.<sup>45</sup> After all, it was only the violent Spanish colonization of Mayan Mesoamerica that finally forced, through accidental local adaptation, an explicit Mary-Moon connection after centuries of coy precolonial Latin Christian innuendo—but only to enforce the same rule: goddesses must always be colonially sexually subject.<sup>46</sup>

The global historical record offers better balance. Simply put: humans have often experienced the Moon as male and occasionally as female—and just as often as both. This gender ambiguity just makes good empirical sense. The power of the Moon over the Earth, its physical and extraphysical gravitational enforcement of the eternal Cycle, is patently imperial, as is its power over human consciousness itself via dreamtime and divination,

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42. *Almaqah* seems to mean something like “the god who hears/watches”—highly appropriate to the Moon’s Arabic associations with surveillance. Note that some neighboring cognate Sun deities, like Mesopotamian Shamash, tended rather to be male too.

43. Intriguingly, Germanic languages draw on the Proto-Indo-European (PIE) root *\*mē-*, “to measure”: Moon as measurer of time. By contrast, Romance languages (e.g., Latin “Luna”) use PIE root *\*leuk-*, “to light, shine.” The two language families therefore combine to signify All-Measuring Enlightenment.

44. Thanks to Claude.ai (3.5 Sonnet)—the least colonialist, racist, and hallucinatory AI available as of late 2024—for its helpful (if still often wildly counterfactual) prompts here.

45. This is not to say that there were no Latin Christian associations of Mary—widely venerated as female psychopomp to this day—with the Moon; but such associations seem to have been very slight (and with the Crescent Moon only) to avoid tarring with the “pagan” brush, as well as strictly nonscientific and non-imperial.

46. See Pete Sigal, *From Moon Goddesses to Virgins: The Colonization of Yucatecan Sexual Desire* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000).

those perennial tools of state.<sup>47</sup> (Oneiromancy in particular was a favorite practice of many early modern Persianate rulers.<sup>48</sup>) Less useful to the state is the tendency of the Full Moon to disorder human and animal behavior, to cause lunacy; the empirical observation of this weird phenomenon over millennia is enshrined in words and turns of phrase in a great many languages globally. By the same token, to enter Lunar divinatory dreamtime is by definition to become totally psychophysically receptive, a state some cultures associate with femininity (think menstruation as “Moontime”) and/or prepubescence (think virgin boys as ideal scryers). But whatever the Moon’s gender(s), it seems most humans have agreed that his/her receptivity and reflectivity is in no way a weakness, but an occult power to which all can aspire.

Carl Jung—relying primarily on premodern Latin Christian alchemical texts, which weirdly insist on a strict female Moon/male Sun binary not present in their Arabic sources<sup>49</sup>—remythologized this as the power of the Lunar *unconscious* vis-à-vis the Solar *conscious*, while emphasizing the therapeutic need to marry Moon to Sun as psychic equals, with Hermes as Trickster psychopomp.<sup>50</sup> James Joyce’s *Finnegans Wake*, apotheosis of modernism, married this binary totally and vertiginously. That most psychedelic, all-encompassing, ever-cycling Book of the Night embodies the eternal cyclical power of Anna Livia Plurabelle

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47. Fakhr al-Dīn Rāzī’s summary formulations on the Moon-Earth and Moon-Sun relationships were definitive, especially those in his magisterial *Supernal Objectives* (*al-Maṭālib al-‘āliya*, 9 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-‘Arabī, 1407/1987)). In a strictly astral-imperial (and semi-Ishrāqī) move, he hails Moon as King of the Night and vizier to supreme Sun as symbol of the One (1:270)—then proceeds to equate their sovereign power over the sublunary realm. His chapter on the Moon (4:341–45) opens as follows:

The Moon is wholly incomparable to the Sun in bodily size and force of effect—and yet He too has a mighty effect on this world. As scientists report: the Sun’s effect is most manifest in hotness and coldness, but the Moon’s is more powerful in wetness and dryness, [depending on the varying proximity of their bodies to the Earth].

Proofs are then recounted as to the Moon’s direct effect on the following: bodies of water (tides), physical vitality and beauty of living things, lifespans of sea creatures, growth and thickness of hair, production of milk, fullness of brain, whiteness of egg, lethargy and pain, taste of meat, fatness and availability of fish, activity of vermin, growth of trees and plants and their products (especially of the gourd family), and productivity of wells and mines—all waxing and waning or otherwise changing with His changing. He has such effects for three reasons: His swiftness of motion considerably outstrips all other planets, matching the swiftness with which things change in the sublunary realm; He is the closest of the planets to Earth and so naturally of greater influence; His swiftness of motion combines and harnesses the light of all the other planets, which combination is the origin of all occurrences on Earth. The Moon is therefore the Proximate Source. Equally valorizing is Rāzī’s equation of the relationship of Moon to Sun as that of Spirit to the One, eternally effluxing Its Light (7:18–19). See Noble, *Philosophising the Occult*.

48. See, e.g., Özgen Felek and Alexander D. Knysh, eds., *Dreams and Visions in Islamic Societies* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2012).

49. In particular, the standard Latin association of gold with the Sun and therefore maleness and silver with the Moon and therefore femaleness would seem to be simply absent in the Arabic alchemical tradition: no text studied to date describes the fundamental Active/Passive binary in gendered terms. My thanks to Nicholas Harris for this observation.

50. See especially Jung, “On the Psychology of the Trickster Figure,” in *The Trickster: A Study in American Indian Mythology*, ed. Paul Radin, 195–211 (New York: Schocken, 1972).

(ALP) as Moon as River as the unconscious, semi-faithfully married to her semi-faithful husband, Humphrey Chimpden Earwicker (HCE), as Sun as Hill as the conscious—but doubly promotes Moon over Sun already from word one (*riverrun, past Eve and Adam's...*). And even this classic Christian gender binary is chymically and kabbalistically dissolved in the work's radically Panopticonic ambiguity, epitomized by the Hermetic Thrice-great Trinity formed by their children: Shem the Penman, Shaun the Postman, and Issy the Mirror-Cloud-Rainbow-Moon (among other powerfully reflective things). Here Joyce is at his most Mercurian: he kaleidoscopically collapses the twin brothers Shem and Shaun into one male being while making their sister Issy a proliferation of twainnesses in the Trickiest takedown of the all-male and entirely Solar Christian Trinity ever penned. (Two of the many possible, mutually reinforcing, and endlessly playful etymologies of Issy's name are "Isis" and "Is he?"—is the Egyptian mother goddess, later associated with the Greek Moon goddess Selene, actually male too?<sup>51</sup> Likewise Issy's doppelgänger Maggy, whose name Mercurially associates Mary Magdalene with magic with the thieving magpie.) The therapeutic lesson being: only a return to silver Moon by way of quicksilver Mercury can restore balance to a pathologically imbalanced Christian industrial modernity.<sup>52</sup>

Trinities, in short, imbalanced by definition, demand to be balanced—another trick Hermes was born to turn. Even the all-male Nuṣayrī Trinity relies on Salmān the Persian as Mercury to mediate between Muḥammad as Sun and ʿAlī as Moon; and later popular practice added Fāṭima as Venus for better balance.<sup>53</sup> But from the late fourteenth century onward, a new Islamic Trinity emerged: *Muḥammad-ʿAlī-Fāṭima* as *Sun-Moon-Venus*.<sup>54</sup> First developed for Timurid ideological purposes, this became the Trinity informing all early modern Persianate imperial cultures, Shiʿi and Sunni alike, with talismanry corresponding. It is ostensibly only slightly less imbalanced than its Christian counterpart, with two imperial males and one non-imperial female; read through the correct Hermetic lens, however, its dynamic is radically different—and mindbendingly *Joycean*.

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51. Cf. loose correspondences of Isis-Thoth with Moon-Mercury, with Thoth himself retaining both Selenic and Hermetic associations.

52. It is here no accident that Joyce also consciously integrated and imitated the Quran. See Norman Brown, *Apocalypse and/or Metamorphosis* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 89 (my thanks to Emily Selove for this reference):

[W]e are the first generation in the West able to read the Koran, if we are able to read *Finnegans Wake*... In both the Koran and *Finnegans Wake* this effect of simultaneous totality involves systematic violation of the classical rules of unity, propriety and harmony; bewildering changes of subject; abrupt juxtaposition of incongruities... Like *Finnegans Wake* the Koran rudely insists on indecent conjunctions.

53. Again, there is no such thing as a stable Nuṣayrī doctrine; but in the context of the somewhat consistent Nuṣayrī Trinity *ism-maʿnā-bāb*, Name-Meaning-Door, this occasional association of Salmān as Door and Door as Mercury is astrologically obvious.

54. Shades of the ancient Mesopotamian Moon-Sun-Venus family relationship; see Caiozzo, "Astrological Images."



Fig. 3 & 4. Moon and Mercury/Hermes in ‘Alī ‘Adilshāh, *Nujūm al-‘ulūm* (1570), Dublin, Chester Beatty Library, MS In. 02, fols. 24b and 32b. Note that the bright silver of King Moon’s disc and Scientist Mercury’s stream are now tarnished, which has partially tarnished the gold of the Moon’s face too—this Lunar marriage of silver to gold being archotypically Hermetic.

Here the peculiarly Islamic embrace of the Harranian cult of the Moon as Cosmic King provides the key: for it paired Selenic imperialism with Hermes and the Hermetic sciences and technologies that make Alexandrian world empire possible. In the post-Mongol era, reading this Moon-Mercury pairing through the lens of Ibn ‘Arabī’s theory of *cosmic* empire became standard practice: most of its exponents simply ignored his attachment to Jesus as Seal of Universal Sacral Power in favor of ‘Alī as King-Scientist Moon. The Supreme Master’s freestyling, jazz-scientific approach to planetary associations, equally Joycean, could only inspire his legions of followers to make new associations in turn; and his surprising association of Jesus not with the Sun but with Mercury is likewise highly salient in this context.<sup>55</sup>

But to be Hermetic is to be Hermaphrodite. Associating Fāṭima with Venus as the primary planetary ruler of the Venusian, Friday creed that is Islam is one thing; making Venus also astrologically rule the imperial male natures of both Muḥammad and ‘Alī is another.<sup>56</sup>

55. See n. 25 above and n. 121 below.

56. See the analysis of their Timurid horoscopes below. Medieval Arabic apocalypses tend to emphasize the

But Ibn ‘Arabī’s celebration of the Prophet’s Venusian qualities—per the hadith, his three greatest joys were women, perfume, and prayer—likewise came to pervade post-Mongol Persianate cultures, as evidenced by the boom in Fāṭima-Venus talisman production.<sup>57</sup> By dint of ubiquitous *zāhir/bāṭin* binary logic, her status as both Muḥammad’s daughter and ‘Alī’s wife makes her the Occult to both men’s Manifest, who, like Amaterasu, became mother of the Islamic imperial (*sayyid*) line through her descent from the Sun and marriage to the Moon. Yet ‘Alī is Occult to Muḥammad’s Manifest too, receptive Moon to his active Sun, making this Islamic Trinity simultaneously male-dominant yet female-ruled, with two actives and two passives, and all of them imperial. More: Muḥammad, as Seal of Prophethood and Venusian vessel of Oneness, is simultaneously active and passive in his own being, hence the ideal human embodiment of the cosmic marriage of opposites. Needless to say, such a doubly balanced male-female/active-passive/manifest-occult cycle resonates poorly with the static Christian Trinity—yet weirdly well with the ancient Chinese Yin-Yang Duality, representing Oneness through the balancing of opposites, each of which contains the seed of the other to create the cosmos as eternal cycle. And what impels Moon and Sun to endlessly cycle? Only the gravitational Goddess (or God) Love.<sup>58</sup>

Nor is it any wonder that this new Islamic Trinity was born and flourished under specifically Persianate auspices. For Persian, unlike Arabic (and Hebrew, Greek, Latin), but like English, gradually lost grammatical gender through conquest; but New Persian love poetry took radical ambiguity and obsession with liminality to a similarly Joycean level.<sup>59</sup> Favorite ideals included both marginally pubescent male Turks and Christian cupbearers and the figure of the cruel and capricious male or female love interest, whose alleyway the poet is driven to haunt and to whose doorway he/she cleaves. By the same Hermaphroditic logic, it is the Full Moon, *Māh*, that rose as an ultimate symbol of the Beloved, who can be both male or/and female and human or/and divine in his/her/His/Her status as terrestrial/celestial Doorway to Union.

That homoerotic, heteroerotic, or theoerotic readings of a given Persian ode are often equally possible made generations of European Orientalists predictably uncomfortable; assured of their own Solar and male status at the Center of the Universe, they reprised Christian anti-“pagan” polemic to paint such Tricky Persian Moon worship as the epitome

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planetary rulerships of Christianity (Sun) and Judaism (Saturn) vis-à-vis Islam (Venus) and occasionally warn of the emergence of a Moon religion as a sign of the Last Hour.

57. Ibn ‘Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, ed. M. Bīdārfar, 2 vols. (Qom: Intishārāt Bīdār, 1420/2000), ch. 27.

58. On Love as ultimate cosmic principle, see Sachiko Murata, *The Tao of Islam: A Sourcebook on Gender Relationships in Islamic Thought* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992); Melvin-Koushki, “Imperial Talismanic Love.” That some early modern Persianate Platonist-Pythagorean philosophers held Venusian Green to be the *barzakh* between Black (matter) and White (spirit) is likewise wonderfully salient. See Mathieu Terrier, “Bahā’ al-Dīn al-Lāhijī,” in *Handbook of Qur’ānic Hermeneutics*, ed. Georges Tamer, 3:319–36 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2025), 332; my thanks to Michael Chagnon for this reference.

59. Despite its strict grammatical gender, Arabic love poetry often accomplishes the feat of gender ambiguity too; see Thomas Bauer, *A Culture of Ambiguity: An Alternative History of Islam*, trans. Hinrich Biesterfeldt and Tricia Tunstall (New York: Columbia University Press, 2021), ch. 7.

of Eastern female unknowable lascivious Otherness.<sup>60</sup> In the same breath, they scoffed at Oriental poetry's status as licit magic (*sihr ḥalāl*), and hence terminally tainted with *witchiness*. But their reflexive, defensive association of *poetry-Orient-female-Moon-sex-magic* is most instructive.

Everyone knows the *Picatrix*—a somewhat garbled Latin translation of the landmark Arabic grimoire *Goal of the Sage* (*Ghāyat al-ḥakīm*), part of the original Brethren of Purity project—was a major driver of the European Renaissance (in which the fiction of western Europe as the One True West was first floated by chauvinist anti-Arabic humanists); some of the Saints of the “Scientific Revolution” were great fans as well.<sup>61</sup> Even in subpar Latin translation, however, the melding of Moon and Mercury is a standout theme. This pair of planetary intelligences share attributes in a way no others do: both are Tricksters and Changers who mediate all cycles, sway all minds, and embody all planetary opposites—a twinning of obvious Harranian-Hermetic and thence Islamic provenance. (Quicksilver, after all, is silver too.) At the same time, the Moon is unquestionably the Cosmic King.<sup>62</sup> Yet Christian readers contrived to ignore this twinning, congenitally allergic to the “pagan” Mesopotamian-cum-Islamic concept of Moon as equally imperially male. His reduction in the *Picatrix* to a mere “blessed lady” and a “lady of merriment,” while somehow still being “chief and key of all the other planets,” hardly encodes a feminist agenda, but rather a weirdly narrow and equally “pagan” one: only the Greeks, who insisted on a female Moon only, could own the Truth.<sup>63</sup>

60. See Shahab Ahmed, *What Is Islam? The Importance of Being Islamic* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016); Domenico Ingenito, *Beholding Beauty: Sa‘dī of Shiraz and the Aesthetics of Desire in Medieval Persian Poetry* (Leiden: Brill, 2021).

61. Godefroid de Callataÿ, “Magia en al-Andalus: *Rasā’il Ijwān al-Ṣafā’*, *Rutbat al-ḥakīm* y *Gāyat al-ḥakīm* (*Picatrix*),” *Al-Qanṭara* 34, no. 2 (2013): 297–344.

62. Maslama al-Qurṭubī (?), *Ghāyat al-ḥakīm*, ed. Hellmut Ritter (Leipzig: Teubner, 1933), 221–24. Needless to say, this Moon-Mercury melding is more explicit in the original. To correct its Latin garbling, my translation of the Moon rite in the *Ghāya*:

When you wish to pray to the Moon and attend Him, dress in boys’ clothing, white in color, and apply pleasant perfumes and wear a silver ring. Let your movements be swift, your speech melodious and your request fair. Set a silver censer before you... Then say:

I greet you, O Moon, O felicitous and blessed Lord! Cold and humid but of beautiful equilibrium, swiftly gliding, You are the key and chief of all the planets. Your light is radiant and Your glow resplendent. You rule joy and honor and praise. You are the auspicious King, learned in religion, wise in administration, and contemplative of all things—yet a lover of levity and jesting and play! You govern messages and news and expose all secrets. You are most munificent and generous, most merciful and glorious. You are the nearest to us of all the planets and the most powerful among them in Your ability to harm and benefit, harmonizing between them all and transmitting their light. You assuage whatever evil is portended to us. Through Your power all things enjoy peace; through Your weakness all things suffer ruin. Of all things You are the first and the last and are exalted and honored above all planets.

I therefore call upon You through Silyā’il, the angel charged with Your affairs, that You behold with mercy my humility before you, in obedience to God’s rule, and that You fulfill my request to you. I invoke You by all your names: in Arabic, *Qamar*; in Persian, *Māh*; in Greek, *Sam‘ā’il* (*Zamahyl*); in Latin, *Sālīnī* (*Selene*); in Sanskrit, *Sawm* (*Soma*)!

63. See *Picatrix: A Medieval Treatise on Astral Magic*, trans. Dan Attrell and David Porreca (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2019), 177.

Centuries of such deliberate misreading and decoupling led, I suggest, to the modern historiographical reification of “Hermeticism” as a primary structural component of “Western esotericism,” which as an academic field similarly ignored Islam as the Not-West until very recently. That “Hermeticism,” like “Gnosticism,” exists as an artificial academic construct, yet “Selenicism” does not, is an index of the degree to which Christian anti-“pagan” polemic still structures the Euro-American scholarly imagination.<sup>64</sup>



Fig. 5. Yukie Adams, “Crescent Moon” (1992), print no. 65/65 (author’s collection).

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64. Matthew Melvin-Koushki, “Definition as (De)colonial Weapon: Western Esotericism Meets Islamic Occultism and Is Weirdered Out,” *Aries: Journal for the Study of Western Esotericism* 24 (2024): 231–35. See also van Bladel, *The Arabic Hermes*; Wouter J. Hanegraaff, *Esotericism and the Academy: Rejected Knowledge in Western Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Dylan M. Burns, *Apocalypse of the Alien God: Platonism and the Exile of Sethian Gnosticism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014).

**Heaven Crashes the Worldparty: The Islamic Moon as Imperial Hermetic Changer**

All peoples here are related to Moon and speak the same language.<sup>65</sup>

—SNUQUALMI CHARLIE

Swiftest of Change... the Moon is the Proximate Source.<sup>66</sup>

—FAKHR-I RĀZĪ

To become reacquainted with the Moon as Hermetic Trickster and Changer too, we need only look beyond the cultural island that was Latin Christendom, the Lesser West. Shifting or joining genders like a shaman, he/she features as or is associated with the Trickster in human cultures as historically radically unconnected as West African and Native American, Chinese and Polynesian, Japanese and Mayan, Australian Aboriginal and Inuit.<sup>67</sup> Indeed, the association of the fleetfooted planetary body Mercury with Hermetic themes would appear to be peculiar to the eastern Mediterranean; elsewhere it is the Moon that dominates. This includes the various Native American Trickster figures of Coyote and Raven, both often Selenic, and above all the Salish Moon as Changer of the world.<sup>68</sup> It also includes Vedic astronomy-astrology, whose Mercury (Budha) resonates in many respects with Mediterranean Hermes, yet makes him the son of the Moon god Chandra—an Eastern father-son relationship that just happened to rhyme perfectly with a non-Greek but equally Western one. For the double marriage of Harranian-Hermetic astrology to both Ptolemaic and Vedic star science is peculiar to Islamic cultures: it is this confluence alone that explains the intimate Moon-Mercury relationship in Arabo-Persian astral magic from the *Goal of the Sage* onward, the Christian allergy to such relationships notwithstanding.

Like a Hermetic partycrasher, the Mongol conquest then Changed and Connected the world—making star-straining Sky-worship the *sine qua non* and primary technology of

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65. Arthur C. Ballard, *Mythology of Southern Puget Sound* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1929), 80.

66. *Al-Maṭālib al-‘āliya*, 4:345; and see n. 47 above.

67. A classic study is Harold Scheub, *Trickster and Hero: Two Characters in the Oral and Written Traditions of the World* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2012). Despite Greek gender weirdness, the story of pre-Moon Arcadia resonates with the Salish—the coming of Moon Transformed the world into the one we know.

68. “Salish” is an Englished group name for the Indigenous cultures of the Pacific Northwest, including both Coast and Interior (to the Rockies), which share stories of Moon, Sun’s older brother, as the Transformer. Ballard’s translation of the Transformer cycle as told by Snuqualmi Charlie (b. ca. 1850) is representative (*Mythology of Southern Puget Sound*, 69–80, esp. 80):

After he had changed everything, and before he entered upon the work of giving light, Moon created the various peoples and all the rivers as they are now... These couples increased until many people were on these rivers. This is why the Indians have multiplied. It is all the work of Moon and no one else but Moon... Though white people overwhelm us, it is Moon that placed us here, and the laws we are bound to obey are those established by Moon in the ancient time... All peoples here are related to Moon and speak the same language.

For Raven and Coyote, see John Crowley, *Ka: Dar Oakley in the Ruin of Ymr* (London: Saga Press, 2017).

universal empire once again.<sup>69</sup> Early modern Persianate imperial cultures accordingly expressed their Iranian-Greek-Mongol-Islamic genes in surprising and heretical (per modern Protestant colonialist-Orientalist historiography) new ways. Among the most surprising: the Timurid reinvention of world conquest as an operation expressly *Selenic*. Like a Salish Moon, in fifteenth-century Sunni Iran ‘Alī became the greatest world-historical Changer and Connector of the Islamic age. Unlike previous or parallel global iterations of Selenicism, this Persianate transformation happened, Hermetically enough, by twinned Greek-Islamic means: the Ptolemaic science of astrology and the Pythagorean science of lettrism.

Horoscopy has been a favorite tool of court historians and astrologers (often the same person) for millennia. Consciously embracing local Sumerian-Babylonian and Iranian precedent, the ‘Abbasids were the first Islamic dynasty to tell the story of their imperial legitimacy in rigorously astrological terms, and Baghdad’s own horoscope was famous.<sup>70</sup> The Mongol Revolution that terminated their caliphate again raised imperial sights Skyward—quite physically: the Ilkhanid observatory at Maragha and then the Timurid observatory at Samarkand produced the two most mathematically precise star tables (sg. *zīj*) known to humankind to date, the latter so empirically accurate that it was used everywhere from Aceh to London to the nineteenth century. Their seventeenth-century Mughal update further married Ptolemaic and Vedic methods, Greece and India, under lettrist auspices—a West-East marriage that made the already strong Moon-Mercury connection (the Ptolemaic first and second spheres) even more robust.<sup>71</sup> But what drove this “proto-modern” lust for astronomical empiricism? The still oft-repeated story that astronomy was gradually divorced from astrology from the thirteenth century onward is a related colonialist-Orientalist fable: the point of precise astronomy is precise astrology as an ultimate post-Mongol Persianate imperial technology of Time.<sup>72</sup>

Thus it was that Timurid imperial horoscopy became the gold standard among competing Sky-worshiping Persianate states for centuries after; and thus it was that the most gorgeous and famous Islamic imperial horoscope ever painted is Timurid too. (That it continues to be everywhere reproduced on modern textbook and exhibit covers to represent Science in Islam is yet another wonderfully piquant colonialist-Orientalist irony, talismanically reinforcing the story of Islam’s beautiful but essentially medieval and pseudoscientific

69. On Mongol Sky-worship, see Jonathan Z. Brack, *An Afterlife for the Khan: Muslims, Buddhists and Sacred Kingship in Mongol Iran and Eurasia* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2023); on partycrashing and the Trickster, see Emily Selove, *Ḥikāyat Abī al-Qāsim: A Literary Banquet* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016).

70. Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture*; Antoine Borrut, “Court Astrologers and Historical Writing in Early Abbasid Baghdad: An Appraisal,” in *The Place to Go: Contexts of Learning in Baghdad, 750–1000 CE*, ed. Jens Scheiner and Damien Janos, 455–501 (Princeton, NJ: The Darwin Press, 2014). Borrut expands on this survey in his forthcoming book, *Astrology and History in Early Islam: Aligning Heaven and Earth*.

71. Matthew Melvin-Koushki, “Timurid-Mughal Philosopher-Kings as Sultan-Scientists,” in *Rulers as Authors in the Islamic World: Knowledge, Authority and Legitimacy*, ed. Maribel Fierro, Sonja Brentjes, and Tilman Seidensticker, 596–630 (Leiden: Brill, 2024). Specifically, Ulugh Beg’s (r. 1409–49) *Zīj-i jadīd-i sulṭānī* (*New Sultanic Star Tables*) was the first in the world to achieve arcminute precision.

72. Matthew Melvin-Koushki, “Powers of One: The Mathematicalization of the Occult Sciences in the High Persianate Tradition,” *Intellectual History of the Islamicate World* 5, no. 1 (2017): 127–99.

Otherness.) This horoscope, of course, is that of Iskandar Sulṭān (r. 1409-14), grandson of Temür and, befitting his name, an occult-philosopher-king of Alexandrian ambitions.

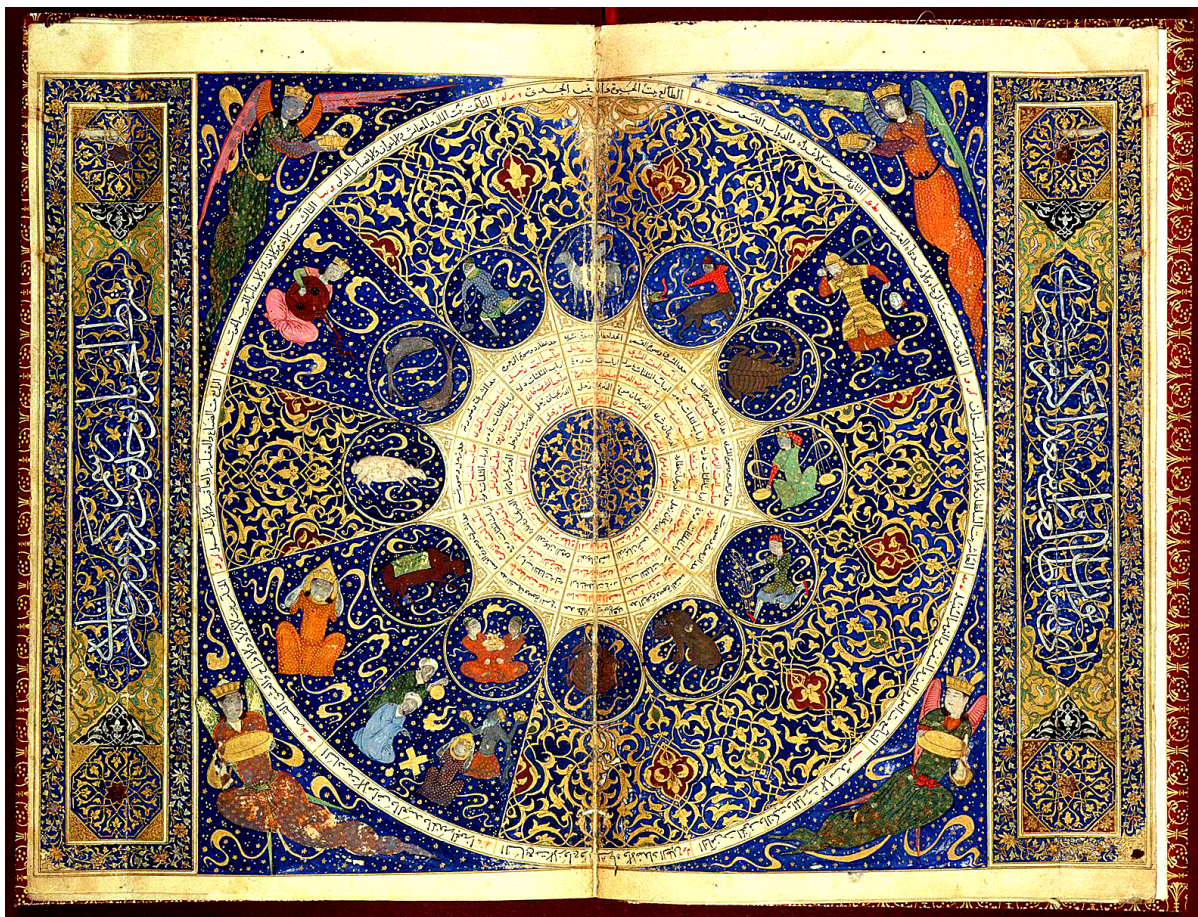


Fig. 6. Iskandar Sulṭān's horoscope (1411), London, Wellcome Collection, MS Persian 474.

Like Temür's, his Ascendant is in Capricorn—the sign of world revolution through its marriage of opposites. His Sun in Venus-ruled Taurus in the fifth house resonates beautifully with his Venus in Pisces in the third—hence his role as one of the most influential patrons of the book arts of the Persianate world and a great lover of music, wine, and sex, both homo- and heteroerotic. Such Venusian pleasures marry their opposite with his Mars in Mars-ruled Scorpio in the eleventh house, proclaiming the native Lord of Feast and Fight (*bazm u razm*) in classic Turko-Mongol Perso-Islamic warlord style.<sup>73</sup> Leaving no doubt as to its definitively lettrist theme, the horoscope's already double marriage of imperial opposites is hugely amplified by Iskandar's four-planet stellium in Gemini in the sixth house: Moon, Mercury, Jupiter, and Saturn. Here again we enter strictly Joycean territory. Marrying the ultimate opposites of Jupiter and Saturn, then marrying their alchemical union with the marriage in turn of Moon and Mercury, both self-marrying, and all under the auspices of Mercury-ruled

73. Melvin-Koushki, "Imperial Talismanic Love"; Noble, *Philosophising the Occult*.

Gemini and in auspicious aspect to Venus, this stellium transmogrifies Iskandar’s horoscope from a blunt if beautiful statement of imperial ambition into a kaleidoscopically and indeed psychedelically Selenic-Hermetic engine of empire: its twinings within twinings within more Tricky twinings still are designed as a map for the conquest of the cosmos.<sup>74</sup>

This is the imperial-scientific context in which ‘Alī as Moon came to be astrologically reread as a model for all World-Changers—including Temür himself, a Lunar Lord of Conjunction, Muslim brother to the Solar pagan Alexander.<sup>75</sup> Emblematising the Timurid shift away from Chinggis Khan and toward ‘Alī as symbol of sovereignty is a later fifteenth-century entry in the venerable Arabo-Persian *Jāmāsp-nāma* tradition, of ancient Zoroastrian apocalypticist provenance, whose twelfth- and thirteenth-century iterations similarly tracked the Seljuq and Mongol eras in astrological terms.<sup>76</sup> But here it is ‘Alī—with the base and brutish Temüjin (Chinggis Khan) as foil—who is exalted as ultimate saint-philosopher-king and warrior-dervish-scientist, a War Moon conqueror of 14 kingdoms, whose inexorable transit inaugurates a new world age.

That age is encapsulated by his Moon and Venus conjunct his Ascendant in the first house in Martial Scorpio: Feast and Fight as a Lunar marriage. That his Part of Fortune and Part of the Unseen (aka Spirit) are also conjunct his Ascendant guarantees the world-historical influence of this marriage both manifestly and occultly. Yet the horoscope also marries imperial glory to personal sacrificial suffering: his Mercury-Sun-Jupiter stellium in Virgo in the eleventh house gives him kingly wealth he cannot use; the conjunction of Mars and Saturn, the two malefics, in Pisces in the fifth house portends the slaughter of his children and the persecution of his line. In sharp contrast to earlier Shi‘i (and Jesuan) tellings of the tragedy of the House of the Prophet, however, this Sunni reframing of ‘Alī’s destiny does not hold out eschatological hope, but is declared the origin of Islamic *Empire Now*.

And it is ‘Alī, more than Muḥammad, who is the soul of Islamic—that is, Timurid—Selenic imperialism. Venus (but not the Moon) also dominates the Prophet’s horoscope, conjunct his Ascendant in Venus-ruled Libra, and likewise the Part of Fortune and Part of the Unseen: this explains Islam’s origin as a Venusian religion and Muḥammad’s status as conduit of cosmic Love. But his Mars in Cancer is also conjunct his Midheaven in the tenth

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74. For an excellent if brief art-historical analysis, see Anna Caiozzo, “The Horoscope of Iskandar Sultān as a Cosmological Vision in the Islamic World,” in *Horoscopes and Public Spheres: Essays on the History of Astrology*, ed. Günther Oestmann, H. Darrel Rutkin, and Kocku von Stuckrad, 115–44 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2005). However, it neglects the horoscope’s immediate lettrist context and hence its specific political import. But Caiozzo’s most recent study (“Astrological Images”), though it does not deal with this horoscope, provides crucial visual-historical context; in particular, there she argues for the new Persianate depiction of both Moon and Sun as gender-ambiguous as a reconciliation of competing ancient precedents.

75. Morimoto, “An Enigmatic Genealogical Chart”; Mansouri, “The Greatest Name of God.” That Firdawsī’s imperially iconic *Book of Kings* (*Shāhnāma*), heavily patronized by Muslim Turko-Mongol warlords, styles the Persians (Iran) Solar and the ascendant Turks (Turan) Lunar is salient here; see Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign*, 36.

76. *Book of Jāmāsb on the Horoscopes of the Prophets* (*Kitāb Jāmāsb fī ṭawālī‘ al-anbiyā’*), British Library, MS Add. 7714, fols. 25b–26a. It is briefly contextualized and partially translated in Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign*, 50–53; I add more technical detail here.

house, signaling fame for military exploits too; and Cancer is of course ruled by the Moon.<sup>77</sup> His Venusian softness and Lunar hardness aside, most useful for Timurid ideological and indeed military purposes was Muḥammad's status as Lord of the Saturn-Jupiter Middle Conjunction in Mars-ruled Scorpio in August 571, marking the elemental triplicity shift from Air to Water, which had long been celebrated by scholars as scientific proof for Islam's inauguration as a World-Changing universal imperial culture. The repeat of that very conjunction in October 1365, just as Temür was beginning his career of conquest, therefore indisputably anointed him the supreme World-Changer of Islam, after the model of 'Alī—whose Timurid horoscope more perfectly marries Loving Venus to Warring Scorpio under the auspices of Water-ruling Moon.<sup>78</sup>

In this post-Mongol Persianate ideological-scientific ferment, Fāṭima's new talismanic identity with Venus herself—and hence the soul of Islamic imperialism too via her father and her husband, whose horoscopes she dominates—was the most obvious way to complete the natural astro-lettrist, active-passive circuit. A new Islamic Trinity was thereby constellated: Muḥammad-<sup>c</sup>Alī-Fāṭima as Sun-Moon-Venus as kaleidoscopic marriage of all opposites in a perpetual Yin-Yang-esque cycle. Needless to say, this Trinity, while thoroughly Western, was never formalized as a theological and doctrinal position to compete with the Christian one, rendering it illegible to modern historians. The love of early modern Persianate cultures for ambiguity and riff and play made them allergic to such rictuses and alive to every contradiction possible, irreducibly Hermetic in their devotion to the Riddle.<sup>79</sup>

Iskandar Sulṭān's horoscope is just such a Trinitarian Riddle: the clue is in the crowns. Royal Sun and Moon—both beardless males—and Venus are the only three planets singly crowned; dark and ancient Saturn boasts three of his own to signal his office as Lord of Time. That these Time Trinities twain are meant to be read Hermetically is doubly hinted at by the two (of course) Hermetic signs of Gemini and Libra, both of whom, alone among the signs of the zodiac, are also crowned. But Libra, the Balance, wears his/her crown, while Gemini, the Twins, fight over one—thereby encoding the marriage of the opposites of thrice-crowned Saturn and uncrowned Jupiter as mediated by the marriage of Moon and Mercury. That the four angels of the celestial quadrants are also crowned confirms the cosmic significance of Iskandar's World-Changing nature, like Alexander and 'Alī before him.<sup>80</sup>

If the world is a Riddle, the Word is its key. Iskandar is the first sovereign in recorded history to formally announce astrology and lettrism as the twin supreme sciences of world empire; this peculiarly Timurid astro-lettrist platform would become a centerpiece of intra-

77. British Library, MS Add. 7714, fol. 25a. My thanks to Bink Hallum for a digital copy, and inspiration generally.

78. Matthew Melvin-Koushki, "The Quest for a Universal Science: The Occult Philosophy of Ṣā'īn al-Dīn Turka Iṣfahānī (1369–1432) and Intellectual Millenarianism in Early Timurid Iran" (PhD diss., Yale University, 2012), 4. This was technically not the first but the second conjunction in Scorpio of the fourteenth century; the first was in December 1305. On Lord of Conjunction (*ṣāḥīb-qirān*) theory generally, see Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign*; Naindeep Chann, "Lord of the Auspicious Conjunction: Origins of the *Ṣāḥīb-Qirān*," *Iran and the Caucasus* 13 (2009): 93–110.

79. See again Ahmed, *What Is Islam?*, and Bauer, *A Culture of Ambiguity*.

80. See Caiozzo, "The Horoscope"; the horoscope interpretation here is my own. For context, see Melvin-Koushki, "Early Modern Islamic Empire."

Persianate imperial competition through at least the seventeenth century. But astrology is only a technology of Time; lettrism is a technology of both Time and Reality itself—and ‘Alī was its inventor.<sup>81</sup>

So argued Ibn Turka, Iskandar’s inspiration, whose systematization of lettrism as imperial Pythagorean philosophy supplied the source code for the cosmos as infinite mental-physical effluxion of the One. Turning the standard Avicennan-Suhravardian schema on its head, his radically new lettrist theory of perception likewise makes Sight the most Descended, physically universal sense and so the royal road of Ascent back to metaphysically universal mathematical Mind—which theory was immediately applied in the scientific program of his friends at the Samarkand Observatory with epochal success.<sup>82</sup> And since that cosmic source code is binary, its harnessings must be by definition Hermetic: the *coincidentia oppositorum* (*majma‘ al-aḍḍād*) is the principle that drives all being and nonbeing alike. True to Harranian-Hermetic form, Ibn Turka, philosopher of post-Mongol Sunni empire, encompassed and transcended every early modern school of Islamic thought to glorify the ‘Alid Moon as Changer of Time and Writer of Reality and hence supreme vehicle of *mathesis* as *gnōsis*.

He therefore took up the Prophetic miracle that is the Twaining of the Moon (*shaqq-i qamar*) as a metaphor structuring the evolutionary and historically progressive hierarchy of all human knowledge—and for lettrists, metaphors are quite literally *magic*.<sup>83</sup> In an eponymous 1426 Persian treatise, *On the Twaining of the Moon and the Last Hour*, popular among courtly audiences from Mughal India to Ottoman Anatolia, Ibn Turka traces the seven epistemic-historical levels of Q 54:1—*The Hour has drawn nigh: the Moon is twained*—as a map of Hermetic-theurgic Ascent-and-Descent:

1. Scriptural literalists hold this traumatic, shock-and-awe miracle to be a physical event in the past, without explanation.
2. Dialectical theologians agree, but selectively dip into Aristotelian philosophy to explain its mechanics.
3. Aristotelian philosophers reject it as physically impossible, and therefore symbolic of the Moon’s status as the Active Intellect and proximate Doorway to the Chain of Being.
4. Enlightenment philosophers agree, but up the existential, contemplative ante—it is rather symbolic of the intermixed mode of Light, born of the Central Fire and occult source of all being, whose intermixing (splitting) makes manifest all that was, is, and will be.

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81. Melvin-Koushki, “Early Modern Islamicate Empire.”

82. Matthew Melvin-Koushki, “Ibn Turka’s (835/1432) Pythagorean Elevation of Sight over Hearing as Vehicle of Total Perception,” in *Islamic Sensory History*, vol. 3, ed. Christian Lange and Yusuf Unal (Leiden: Brill, forthcoming).

83. See Emily Selove, “Magic as Poetry, Poetry as Magic: A Fragment of Arabic Spells,” *Magic, Ritual, and Witchcraft* 15, no. 1 (2020): 33–57. See also Ibn Manẓūr’s (d. 1312) classic definition of *siḥr* in his landmark *Language of the Arabs* (*Lisān al-‘Arab*) as “turning something into other than its proper state” (*ṣarf al-shay’ ‘an ḥaqīqatihi ilā ghayrihi*)—which is to say, Magic is the ultimate psychophysiological technology of Change. As for *shaqq*, it is usually translated as splitting, but more literally means splitting into halves.

5. Sufis, forsaking reason for the experiential path of Love, worship the Moon as sigil of the divine Beloved, whose splitting signals the unveiling of the perfect occult meaning of every imperfect manifest form in every moment.
6. Timefree lettrists, ascending higher, hold the Moon as magical and hence real metaphor for Speech beyond being, whose phases are the process of bringing nonbeing into being through Speaking—or rather Writing: since *qamar* (Moon) is *raqam* (Writing), its splitting creates the Pen that eternally writes the cosmos. The World as Text.<sup>84</sup>
7. Timebound lettrists, descending back to Earth as ardent scriptural literalists, again worship the Moon as the physical expression of metaphysical Meaning—split and dispersed to the world through the invention of lettrism by ‘Alī, the Lightbearing Moon, whose historical self-twaining was the advent of the Last Hour: for this science alone gives humanity knowledge of and agency over all things in Time.<sup>85</sup>

As Ibn Turka makes clear in his magnum opus, *Investigations (Kitāb al-Mafāḥiṣ)*, the first summa of Islamic Pythagoreanism, the world must be investigated as a *mathematical-linguistic* text; this scientific program corresponds to Lunar level six above. It likewise corresponds to later Latin Christian calls for the same program by sainted Pythagorean scientists like Kepler, Galileo, and Newton, who also held up the complex cycling of the Moon as mathematical conundrum and hence Doorway to understanding the Book of Nature as a second scripture—the core theme of the “Scientific Revolution” story.<sup>86</sup> Yet Galileo’s (d. 1642) celebrated telescopic observation of the cratered Lunar disc was immediately visually and theologically represented as a maculate downgrading of the Immaculate Mary’s cosmic status, in classic Latin Christian anti-Moon fashion.<sup>87</sup> By contrast, Ibn Turka’s declaration here and throughout his oeuvre that “knowledge is power” preceded Francis Bacon’s (d. 1626) (in)famous motto by a full two centuries; and where the Englishman Bacon—also a committed Pythagorean occult philosopher—actually said “God’s knowledge is power,” his Iranian predecessor routes all divine and cosmic knowledge through King Moon.<sup>88</sup>

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84. Ibn Turka is the first major philosopher to assert the superiority of Writing to Speech, based on the physical-metaphysical superiority of Sight to Hearing, and drawing on pre-Mongol literary precedent, including al-Jāhiz; see Melvin-Koushki, “Pythagorean Elevation”; idem, “Better than Sufi Sex: Ibn Turka on the Superiority of Lettrism to Sufism as Model of Occult Islamic Humanism,” in “Islam ed esoterismo/Islam and Esotericism,” ed. Michele Olzi and Lisa Pizzighella, special issue, *La Rosa di Paracelso*, no. 2 (2020 [2022]): 53–80. Cf. the Shinto-Japanese Moon god Tsukuyomi as “Moon Reading” above.

85. For a translation and contextualization of this treatise, see Melvin-Koushki, “The Quest,” ch. 6, and 453–61. Predictably, modern reformist exegetes accept none of these interpretations, insisting rather that it must have been an atmospheric trick, an illusion—forgetting that illusionism too is real magic; see Melvin-Koushki, “The Occult Court.” On the lettrist roots of modern Islamic reformism, see Daniel J. Morgan, “Spokesman of the Unseen World: Shāh Walī Allāh (1703–62), Islamic Reform and Applied Cosmology in Late-Mughal Delhi” (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 2021).

86. Melvin-Koushki, “Powers of One.” Isaac Newton (d. 1727) in particular is credited with raising the “three-body problem” caused by the Moon’s influence on the Sun-Earth gravitational relationship.

87. Steven F. Ostrow, “Cigoli’s *Immacolata* and Galileo’s Moon: Astronomy and the Virgin in Early Seicento Rome,” *The Art Bulletin* 78, no. 2 (1996): 218–35.

88. On this misunderstood Baconian motto, see Josephson-Storm, *The Myth of Disenchantment*, 46–47.

And by the power of knowledge he means *computing power*. Here the seventh, highest-yet-lowest stage refers in particular to ‘Alī’s invention of the Comprehensive Prognosticon (*jafr-i jāmi‘*). Fāṭima too is credited with the invention of a prototype.<sup>89</sup> (That Leibniz (d. 1716) is still hailed in the historiography as the True Father of modern computing, despite his dependence on the peculiarly Afro-Islamic science of geomancy, lettrism’s sister, is par for the Eurocentrist course.)<sup>90</sup> A Pythagorean and Hermetic astro-lettrist computer, its 784 pages, with 784 cells and 3,136 letters per page (87,808 cells and 2,458,634 letters total), must be completed over 1,001 days, strictly observing planetary conditions, and in a state of ritual and dietary purity and seclusion—and by a *sayyid* only. But the arduousness of its production and activation only makes such a computer more imperially attractive and indispensable. As Ibn Turka’s Kurdish mentor Sayyid Ḥusayn Akhlāṭī (d. 1397) advised in his tract on the subject: “Nothing is unknown to those who know the secrets of the Prognosticon, and all of creation must submit to whomever owns one.”<sup>91</sup> We are well beyond the Avicennan Moon as Doorway to the Cosmos of use only to philosophers and prophets; this Hellenic-Islamic theurgic Ascent-and-Decent computing protocol makes the ‘Alid Moon an imperial Panopticon.

### ‘Alī versus Jesus: The Politics of Enlightenment Embodied

The gate of this glorious King  
links to heaven as Moon to religion!<sup>92</sup>

—MAḤMŪD DIHDĀR

The declaration [of faith] therefore means: God—there is no god but God, and ‘Alī is His occult Secret, His faithful Saint-King (*walī*), His Light that pervades the heavens and the earth.<sup>93</sup>

—RAJAB AL-BURSĪ

The term “Scientific Revolution” is patently a Eurocentrist and colonialist polemic; the term “Enlightenment”—referring to an equally tiny coterie of western European men weirdly assured of their world-historical role as sole incarnation of the male Sun of Reason born to rule a female planet Earth—is even more so. At the base of both, however, is a politics of Light.

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See also Ebba Koch, “Jahangir as Francis Bacon’s Ideal of the King as an Observer and Investigator of Nature,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 19, no. 3 (2009): 293–338.

89. Hossein Modarressi, *Tradition and Survival: A Bibliographical Survey of Early Shī‘ite Literature*, vol. 1 (Oxford: Oneworld, 2003), 4–5, 18–19.

90. Matthew Melvin-Koushki, “Persianate Geomancy from Ṭūsī to the Millennium: A Preliminary Survey,” in *Occult Sciences in Pre-modern Islamic Cultures*, ed. Nader El-Bizri and Eva Orthmann, 151–99 (Beirut: Orient-Institut Beirut, 2018).

91. Melvin-Koushki, “The Quest,” 288–89.

92. *Kashf al-asrār*, trans. in Melvin-Koushki, “Occult Ecumenism,” 8.

93. *Mashāriq anwār al-yaqīn*, trans. in Melvin-Koushki, “Safavid Twelver Lettrism,” 13; see also Mansouri, “The Greatest Name of God.”

My translation of *Ishrāq* as “Enlightenment” lays this occulted politics bare. In the first place, it is more philologically and historically accurate than the standard “Illuminism,” which has had the historiographical effect of marginalizing this major Platonic-Aristotelian philosophical school, imperially dominant across Afro-Eurasia, as a merely passive Oriental and hence mystical creed unconnected to the active “Western” tradition that currently rules the world. Why is it that in English we moderns are by definition Enlightened but rarely Illumined too, since these two words—the first Anglo-French and the second Latin—are technically exact synonyms?<sup>94</sup>

As I argue, the reflexive historiographical invocation of “Enlightenment” as a strictly western European phenomenon encodes a specifically colonialist form of Heliocentrism. Yet the Islamic philosophical school famed as *Ishrāq* was even more explicitly Heliocentric, in classic Pythagorean, Platonic-Orientalist style, pivoting on the *nous* as Central Fire and the Sun as Tetractys, and no less actively imperialist than its later Latin Christian counterpart. But thanks to its different epigenetics, the Islamic Enlightenment of the post-Mongol Persianate world was far more comfortable with Hermetic ambiguity and outright contradiction: so it was that Moon and Sun together, married by Mercury and Venus, became a double vehicle of philosophical and technological Enlightenment—as well as its primary ideological battleground.

Even more than its Latin iteration, Persianate imperial Enlightenment culture, pervaded by a lettrist consciousness, rejoiced in both the Riddle and the Debate.<sup>95</sup> I have discussed elsewhere Ibn Turka’s transformation of the popular *munāzara* genre of venerable antiquity into a lettrist device for scientifically proving Timurid imperial supremacy: his *Debate of Feast and Fight* rewrites Empire as a successful marriage of the external and internal halves of the state through the mediation of Emperor Love, the basis of all being, eternally emanating from the One to create the cosmos out of infinite Manifest/Occult and Active/Receptive dualities.<sup>96</sup> Timurid Iran being the model for all competing and successor empires, especially the Safavid, Mughal (Indo-Timurid), and Ottoman, this elegant, radically new-old political philosophy—the State as Debate—became standard throughout the Persian cosmopolis.

Under such cultural conditions, a dialectical showdown between Avicennan Selenocentrism and Suhrawardian Heliocentrism was inevitable. By the same astro-lettrist logic of transcendent Aphroditic Love, however, this Debate of the Two Lights was guaranteed to end in a kiss.<sup>97</sup> That this philosophical and literary resolution was also a political one

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94. A similar rational vs. mystical distinction occurs in other modern European languages—and in modern Arabic and Persian too, according to the same colonialist-Orientalist logic.

95. On *lettrist consciousness*, see Matthew Melvin-Koushki, “Of Islamic Grammatology: Ibn Turka’s Lettrist Metaphysics of Light,” *Al-Uṣūr al-Wuṣṭā* 24 (2016): 42–113.

96. Melvin-Koushki, “Imperial Talismanic Love.”

97. And also a bite: for the Head and the Tail of the great Dragon (*jawzahr*), encircling *ouroboros* eternally self-eating, by eclipsing the Sun and the Moon respectively marries them forever—whence Suhrawardī’s symbolically styling the Dragon the terrestrial-celestial Rope that is Platonic theurgy. See Shihāb al-Dīn

helps explain why a Politics of Enlightenment informs so much of early modern Persianate material culture too. Simply put: the Safavid embrace of *‘Alī as Moon* provoked Mughal and Ottoman adoptions of *Jesus as Sun*, with imperial iconography, artifacts, and architecture corresponding; and all draw from the same Pythagorean-Harranian-Alexandrian-Avicennan-Suhravardian-Akbarian well.

But intellectual historians and art historians tend to be siloed off from each other, and neither camp generally shares the Hermetic *munāẓara* consciousness that pervades their Persianate sources. This central Moon-Sun/‘Alī-Jesus binary has thus not been noted by any historian to date, thereby leaving key textual and artifactual exemplars of Persianate imperial cultures *unriddled*. A case in point is Iskandar Sulṭān’s celebrated horoscope: a gorgeous Timurid riddle that cannot be solved without understanding its astro-lettrist algorithm. While the emergence of the Moon-Sun/‘Alī-Jesus binary is a sixteenth-century phenomenon peculiar to Safavid, Mughal, and Ottoman ideological competition, it is a product of the same algorithm, which generated similarly gorgeous material expressions from Iran to India to Anatolia and beyond. As an impetus to combined intellectual- and art-historical investigations of this binary going forward, I offer a few telling examples here.

Their Sunni-Shi‘i divergence notwithstanding, Safavid imperial culture represents a smooth continuation of Timurid precedent, especially occult-scientifically; more, it is responsible for bringing Timurid theories into material being. Most spectacularly, Isfahan, as noted, was so radically, explicitly reconstructed along Pythagorean-lettrist lines as to become the first world capital of Enlightenment itself: city as talismanic Panacea and Panopticon, and mosque as theurgic Spaceship to the Moon.<sup>98</sup> Especially warm was the Safavid Shi‘i embrace of Timurid Sunni Selenocentrism, given its strictly ‘Alid mode as theorized by Ibn Turka. That mode was then extended by his fellow New Brother Maḥmūd Dihdār, whose lettrist analyses of ‘Alī’s name scientifically prove his primordial, cosmic identity as both Moon and King of Kings, avatar of the One, as well as Doorway to his cousin Muḥammad the Sun.<sup>99</sup>

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Suhravardī, “A Tale of Occidental Exile,” in *The Philosophical Allegories and Mystical Treatises*, ed. and trans. Wheeler M. Thackston (Costa Mesa: Mazda, 1999), 115; Sara Kuehn, “The Dragon in Transcultural Skies: Its Celestial Aspect in the Medieval Islamic World,” in *Spirits in Transcultural Skies: Auspicious and Protective Spirits in Artefacts and Architecture between East and West*, ed. Niels Gutschow and Katharina Weiler, 71–97 (Cham: Springer, 2015).

98. See above. On Timurid-Safavid Sunni-Shi‘i continuity, see Melvin-Koushki, “Occult Ecumenism”; idem, “The Occult Court.”

99. Melvin-Koushki, “Occult Ecumenism,” 27–29; cf. Mansouri, “The Greatest Name of God.” Specifically, he riffs on Ibn ‘Arabī’s and Bursī’s association of Adam with the Moon to make ‘Alī the primordial Adam. Dihdār likewise follows Bursī in making Muḥammad and ‘Alī also the primordial *source* of Sun and Moon; as he sings in the same work (Melvin-Koushki, “Occult Ecumenism,” 10–11):

These forms are two but have one meaning  
nor in their form or meaning is there any doubt.  
The one is the Seal of all prophets,  
the other the King of all saints.  
These two are one Light from which were kindled  
the Sun and the Moon by God’s decree.

That some Safavid scholars did indeed practice ‘Alid Selenic theurgy to materially embody Enlightenment is indicated by the existence of a gorgeous, freestanding cosmographical diagram of the early seventeenth century, now preserved at the Farjam Foundation in London; the largest-known specimen to date (almost two and a half feet tall), two holes at the top and signs of frequent use suggest that it was hung for ritual visualization purposes.<sup>100</sup> For this iconic instance of Safavid material culture is expressly *psychedelic*: a mesmerizing, wonder-inducing prop for doffing the body to experience Mīr Dāmādiān metatime. A Hermetic riddle, its equation of ‘Alī with Moon as Doorway to the Cosmos could not be more lettrist—nor could its recursive Twainings upon Twainings be more Joycean. Specifically, the diagram maps the opening quatrain of Mīr Dāmād’s *Firebrands and Epiphanies* (*Jazavāt u mavāqīt*), a Persian summary of his philosophical system wholly recast in lettrist terms; copied here in the top right, these lines play with the letters ع and ن to figure forth ‘Alī as simultaneously Crescent Moon and Full Moon, cosmic Inkwell and originary Dot (*nuqṭa*) preceding and pervading the Book of Creation.<sup>101</sup> So does “Ishrāq” himself resolve the Debate between Avicennan Selenocentrism and Suhrawardian Heliocentrism by proclaiming a new Selenicist theurgic Enlightenment.

But this artifact is strictly lettrist; what of astrology? Court horoscopy aside, here the humble magic bowl—a perennially popular material-cultural genre of venerable Mesopotamian antiquity—provides a surprising index of this Timurid-Safavid Selenocentrist shift. A product specific to the eastern Mediterranean for over a millennium, its design schemes focused on incantations in various languages (especially Aramaic and Hebrew) and were very rarely astrological. Yet the magic bowls that suddenly began to be produced in Iran under Timurid and especially Safavid auspices are frequently so; by the same token, they mark a seismic morphological break with precedent by adding a raised central boss—two features that track the peculiarly post-Mongol Persianate imperial marriage of Sky to Centrism unusually well.<sup>102</sup> And one Safavid bowl of 1608 in particular—not coincidentally the height of Mīr Dāmād’s political and philosophical career—is the very epitome of astro-lettrist Selenocentrism. Preserved at the Museum of Fine Arts in Houston, this remarkable specimen features the seven planets orbiting the central boss that is ‘Alī, encircled by ‘Alid invocations, with the Moon exceptionally visually depicted as sole King; the firmament beyond is an undulating continuum of prayers to the Twelve Imams; and the twelve signs of the zodiac on the bowl’s exterior complete the cosmological picture.

100. The first study of this remarkable cosmological diagram is Christiane Gruber, “The Prophet Muḥammad’s ‘Ayn Seal: A Safavid-Period Diagram as Cosmic Vision,” in *The Diagram as Paradigm: Cross-Cultural Approaches*, ed. Jeffrey Hamburger, David Roxburgh, and Linda Safran, 515–31 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2022), 515–31. For its context within Mīr Dāmād’s thought and practice, see Melvin-Koushki, “Mīr Dāmād’s *On Doffing*.”

101. *Jazavāt u mavāqīt*, ed. ‘Alī Awjabī, gloss. Mullā ‘Alī Nūrī (Tehran: Mīrās-i Maktūb, 1380sh/2001), 1. This lettrist quatrain is translated in Melvin-Koushki, “World as (Arabic) Text,” 420n151:

Two ‘ayns, two ‘ayns not written by any pen,  
each of the two ‘ayns having two ‘ayns within it.  
Two nūns, two nūns not written by any pen,  
each of the two nūns having two nūns within it.

102. My thanks to Lyla Halsted for sharing her work in progress, “Magic-Medicinal Bowls and Their Ephemeral Precursors: Broad Spectrum Therapeutic Efficacy in al-Ṭabasī’s *Shāmīl fī al-baḥr al-kāmil*.” Cf. earlier instances of Heliocentrism in Islamic visual culture; see, e.g., Caiozzo, “The Horoscope,” 122.



Fig. 7. Cosmic ‘ayn-nūn diagram, 50 × 72 cm, Farjam Foundation, London; photo courtesy of the Farjam Foundation, DIFC, Dubai, United Arab Emirates. See also Gruber “‘Ayn Seal,” 523.



Fig. 8 & 9. Safavid magic bowl, 1017 AH/1608 CE; brass, cast and engraved; 2 1/4 × 9 3/8 in., Hossein Afshar Collection at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, TR: 894-2015; photos courtesy of Farshid Emami.

Needless to say, this is far from the first Twelver association of the House of the Prophet and the ‘Alid line with heavenly bodies, standard per the hadith foundational to Shi‘ism itself: *I am like the Sun, and ‘Alī like the Moon, and my children like the stars—follow any of them and you will be guided aright!*<sup>103</sup> In classic Hermetic ambiguating fashion, Dihdār himself declared all of ‘Alī and Fāṭima’s children Moons to Muḥammad as Sun too, and indeed all of the Twelver faithful Moons to the Sun that is Muḥammad al-Mahdī.<sup>104</sup> By contrast, this bowl’s Twelver tenor is equally explicit, but astrologically and hence scientifically rigorous—and radically Selenocentric.<sup>105</sup> By the same token, its twinning of the signs of the zodiac with the Imams opens up a major new front in Twelver astral magic.

In this debate, the Mughal response, equally astral-magical, could not but be radically Heliocentric—and much more explicitly Trinitarian. But it should now come as no surprise that the Mughal Heliocentric Trinity, riffing on Jesus in place of ‘Alī, was designed and successfully deployed as a Hermetic Trick on Christian and Muslim audiences alike. Its reincarnationist elevation of the Emperor to Sun/Son of God status—complete with iconic Solar halo, the ancient Iranian imperial *farr*—was obviously, hilariously offensive to the Jesuit missionaries at court. But they were hardly the primary mark. Most striking is rather its restaging of the Jesus *versus* ‘Alī showdown original to Ibn ‘Arabī himself, whose firmly Jesuan position was shared by few of his Shi‘i and Sunni heirs, most of whom (including the Sunni Ibn Turka) recast the Supreme Master’s theory of sacral power (*walāya*) in strictly ‘Alid terms. Since that theory was a primary conceptual engine of Persianate imperial cultures generally, this restaging was meant and experienced as an act of Joycean partycrashing that hit Safavid and Ottoman ideologues in their respective ‘Alid and Jesuan funny bones.<sup>106</sup>

In retort to both Timurid-cum-Safavid ‘Alid Selenocentrism and Mughal Jesuan Heliocentrism, both Trinitarian, the Ottomans played with a wonderfully ambiguous and doubly Akbarian Duality: ‘Alī *and* Jesus as twin Timelords, Empire as the marriage of brothers Moon and Sun.<sup>107</sup> Much has rightly been made of the Ottoman imperial identity as New Rome and hence natural devotee of Sol Invictus. Yet its claim to ownership of Jesus was strictly *apocalypticist* in the peculiarly Mediterranean mode: Universal Empire as the

103. See, e.g., Muḥammad Bāqir Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, 110 vols. (Beirut: Mu‘assasat al-Wafā’/Dār al-Riḍā, 1403/1983), 16:91; 23:156, 164; 24:74; Ḥaydar Āmulī, *Naṣṣ al-nuṣūṣ fī sharḥ al-Fuṣūṣ*, 3 vols. (Qom: Bīdār, 1394sh/2015), 3:1269. More explicitly imperial-Enlightenment and Panopticonic is a Qajar representative synthesis of ‘Alī’s sermons, which includes the following key cosmic declarations (Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, *The Spirituality of Shi‘i Islam: Beliefs and Practices* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011), 128):

I am the Light of guidance; I am the Most Beautiful Names by which one invokes Him; I am the Overseer of the deeds of all creatures... I am the Governor of the stars and their Steward by the commandment of my Lord and through the science He reserved for me.

104. Melvin-Koushki, “Occult Ecumenism,” 25–26.

105. My thanks to Farshid Emami for sharing his presentation on the subject; his gorgeous *Isfahan* is a major inspiration here. Other bowls with a similar organization may survive, but have not been studied.

106. The authoritative study is Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign*.

107. Shades of Proclus’s ritual worship of Moon and Sun both; see Shaw, *Hellenic Tantra*. In tandem with this Ottoman process, the visual program of Akbar’s son and successor Jahāngīr (r. 1605–27) combined the disc of the Sun with the Crescent Moon as imperial halo; see Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign*, 204–10.

End of Time.<sup>108</sup> Ottoman Jesuanism was thus the perfect ideological challenge to both Latin Christendom to the west and the Mughal Empire to the east, whose Jesuanism was equally millenarian but strictly anti-apocalypticist: Universal Empire as the New Age.<sup>109</sup>

But where Mughal Jesuanism only continued to wax after the arrival of the Millennium in 1592, Ottoman Jesuanism waned well before reaching it; thus ‘Alī as Moon gradually came to dominate as Ottoman imperial symbol from the seventeenth century onward. This is due not least to the continued or indeed increased salience of “‘Oṣmān’s Dream” as Ottoman foundation myth, wherein its dynastic progenitor was struck with a prophetic vision of the Moon descending from heaven to penetrate his chest, whence then sprouted the World Tree. (The myth’s fifteenth-century provenance reveals its original use as a retort to contemporary Timurid ‘Alid Selenocentrism, making it equally useful against the same Safavid claims over the next two centuries.) By the late eighteenth century, both the Two-Horned Sword (*Zū al-Fiqār*) and the similarly Two-Horned Crescent Moon had become so ubiquitous in Ottoman state iconography that western European observers, naturally ignorant of the Selenic (and Alexandrian) associations of ‘Alī’s world-historical weapon, equated its peculiar form of Selenocentrism with Saracenicity, and Saracenicity with Islam itself—whence the appearance of the Crescent Moon on the flags of postcolonial nation-states today to represent the same.<sup>110</sup> From Mauritania, Algeria, Tunisia, and Turkey to Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and Pakistan to Singapore and Malaysia (plus an assortment of smaller states and autonomous regions): that the Crescent Moon—not the Full Moon—is Islam in the modern colonial constitution patently reprises premodern Latin Christian parochial chauvinism, driven, as we have seen, by a bad-faith anti-“pagan” Heliocentrism, whereby Saracenicism as Selenicism just makes sense.<sup>111</sup>

This is the genealogy of Eurocentrism’s own Tricky Duality, a Debate in which Islam as Moon—here meaning not Cosmic King but unknowably female and eternally medieval Oriental Other—must always lose badly to the modern “West” as Sun. (After all, the Sun still

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108. Cornell H. Fleischer, “A Mediterranean Apocalypse: Prophecies of Empire in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries,” *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 61 (2018): 18–90. By this Ottoman standard, Francis Fukuyama’s (b. 1952) much touted End of History thesis comes off as a thinly disguised form of Jesuan apocalypticism too.

109. Again, Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign*; Melvin-Koushki, “Early Modern Islamic Empire.”

110. Ünver Rüstem, “From Auspicious Ornament to State Symbol: The Crescent Moon in Ottoman Art and Architecture,” in *The Moon: A Voyage through Time*, ed. Christiane Gruber, 45–55 (Toronto: Aga Khan Museum, 2019).

111. The only current national flag to feature a Full Moon is that of Palau, possibly as counterpoint to the Japanese flag’s Sun (associated, naturally, with the Sun goddess Amaterasu), but it has no known Islamic connection. (While evocative, the Crescent Moon on the South Carolina state flag does not either.) The flag of Bangladesh also features a red dot, but it officially represents not the Sun but revolutionary blood, and is not a reference to the classic Iranian Lion and Rising Sun standard used by the Heliocentric Mughals—which itself can be read as representing ‘Alī, Lion of God, twinned with Muḥammad, the Sun. The flag of the Islamic Republic replaces this motif with a red tulip—likewise a classic Iranian imperial symbol, also associated with Ḥusayn—encoding the declaration of faith (*tahlīl*), whose four Crescents can be read as Moon references too, and the central pillar a reference to the *Zū al-Fiqār*.

never sets on the Anglophone Empire!) European colonialism can thus be read as a kind of Christian and hence Jesuan imperial partycrashing too—but one of a strictly anti-Hermetic stripe: though it too twains the world, it tolerates no ambiguity nor balance, and there is certainly no kissing at the end.

If the Crescent Moon is tantamount to both Islamic Time and ‘Alī’s World-Changing Sword, the Full Moon is his very face as cosmic Beloved, whose twaining (or *fiqāring*) announces the Last Hour that is World Empire for those who attain to the necessary ‘Alid technology. Imperial enthusiasm for lettrism thus became a defining feature of Persianate cultures from the early Timurid period onward, as we have seen, thanks to Ibn Turka and his fellow New Brethren, who succeeded in making this ancient-modern Pythagorean-Hermetic-‘Alid science a default cosmology of the Persian cosmopolis.<sup>112</sup> But weirdly enough, only the Ottomans seized upon ‘Alī’s Comprehensive Prognosticon as their proprietary *dynastic handbook* in the runup to the Islamic Millennium. And this quite literally: so attached were Ottoman dynasts to these complex and expensive astro-lettrist computers that some even commissioned them in smartphone size to be carried in their boot to battle as a means of satellite surveillance and wargaming.<sup>113</sup>

The Ottoman impulse to personally own Time through Twaining the Moon would seem to be a Mediterranean quirk, characterized by peculiar devotion to Young-Earth Creationism and its strictly linear theory of time—hence history as a 6,000-year race that can be won by achieving world empire. (In the event, the equally eschatological American Empire has now succeeded the Ottoman one as the End of History; and it too is obsessed with the pocket Prognosticon.) Contemporary Mughal imperialism, by contrast, was predicated on the opposing cyclical theory of Deep Time, which accords more naturally with astro-lettrist cosmology, by definition cyclicist, and reincarnation-friendly in its standard Pythagorean mode. The ‘Alīs and Jesuses of Safavid, Mughal, and Ottoman ideologues are very different millennial beings.<sup>114</sup> Yet they share the same philosophical and sociopolitical DNA: despite and because of its relative weakness, Safavid Iran’s sixteenth-century brain drain to the neighboring Mughal, Ottoman, and other realms made for a scholarly diaspora of Pythagoreanizing occult scientists committed to the creation of a pan-Persianate Panopticonic imperial Enlightenment culture, thereby embodying the kissing of the Moon and the Sun through the offices of Mercury and Venus.<sup>115</sup>

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112. Melvin-Koushki, “Of Islamic Grammatology.”

113. Fleischer, “Ancient Wisdom and New Sciences.” But geomancy, lettrism’s sister Pythagorean and equally Panopticonic science, was even more heavily patronized at the Mughal court than the Safavid or Ottoman; see Melvin-Koushki, “Persianate Geomancy.”

114. Melvin-Koushki, “Early Modern Islamicate Empire.” On Persianate reincarnationism generally and Mughal specifically, see Babayan, *Mystics, Monarchs, and Messiahs*; Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign*.

115. Melvin-Koushki, “The Occult Sciences in Safavid Iran.” On Ottoman pro-Safavid diplomatic policy as a useful Shi‘i buffer against their Sunni Mughal rivals—certainly a factor in the divergent developments traced here—see Habib Saçmalı, “The Safavid Buffer: Co-Sectarian Rivalry in Early Modern Ottoman Diplomacy with Sunni Asia,” *Journal of Early Modern History* 28, no. 5 (2024): 392–414.

**Drawing Down the Moon: Islamic Selenicism as Neopagan Imperialism**

See the moon smiling  
Open on all channels  
Ready to receive  
And we're not at the mercy  
Of your shimmerers or spells  
Your shimmerers or spells<sup>116</sup>  
—RADIOHEAD

As forms of Harranian-Hermetic and Platonic-Pythagorean theurgy, the Islamic Twainings of the Moon traced above were by definition operations designed to *draw Him down* too, in the pursuit of Cosmic Kingship. But therein lies the Eurocentrist, Sun-worshipping rub.

For Drawing Down the Moon was the byword for dangerously marginal and strictly female Trickery in ancient Greco-Roman literary-philosophical discourse, in which the Witches of Thessaly first featured as a theatrical joke, then were repurposed by Plato as a cautionary tale; almost two millennia of Christian fixations on or dismissals of the Moon as Tricky female as emblem of “paganism” have since intervened.<sup>117</sup> In a predictable immune response to Christian colonial, industrial, and hence brutally patriarchal modernity, Wicca has transformed the medieval European female vice that is Magic into a Selenocentric, Earth-embracing, Neopagan virtue.<sup>118</sup>

Such a bizarre and anti-empirical Moon-Sun imbalance did not occur in Islamic societies, wherein Harranian Selenicism Hermetically danced as an equal partner to inherited forms of Iranian, Egyptian, Greek, and Roman imperial Heliocism, and the Moon remained very much a Cosmic-Kingly male through early and enduring association with ‘Alī. Different Muslim philosophers and poets choreographed the Moon-Sun dance differently, as with human cultures globally; but this cyclical celestial dance-off came to define post-Mongol, Sky-straining Persianate imperialism to an unparalleled degree. By the same token, the Harranian-Hermetic legacy native to Islam but alien to Christianity served as antidote to the weird Greek insistence on the Moon as female only—the genetic origin of Christian anti-“pagan” Heliocentrism, whence modern Eurocentrism as Sunburn.

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116. “The Numbers,” *A Moon Shaped Pool*, XL Recordings, 2016.

117. On the ancient context, see Radcliffe G. Edmonds III, *Drawing Down the Moon: Magic in the Ancient Greco-Roman World* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2019), 3, 26, and passim. Cf. the Weird Sisters in Shakespeare’s (d. 1616) *Macbeth*—a play first performed in Mīr Dāmād’s lifetime. Happily—though also tellingly—current scholarship on medieval European “witchcraft” and its Lunar associations is wonderfully robust.

118. Or rather, *femivirtue*. See the seminal studies by Margot Adler, *Drawing Down the Moon: Witches, Druids, Goddess-Worshippers and Other Pagans in America*, rev. ed. (New York: Penguin, 1986); Ronald Hutton, *The Triumph of the Moon: A History of Modern Pagan Witchcraft* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001). It is crucial to note that the emphasis on the femininity of witchcraft today is largely a product of medieval Inquisition fictions remythologized and repurposed in the British Occult Revival as a vehicle for modern feminism, rather than reflective of an actual historical constant. At the same time, the ancient Greco-Roman association of Moon magic with female witchery was very much part of the Christian DNA, and over the centuries epigenetically served as a carrier for western European misogyny, sometimes violent.

Paradoxically, however, it was the Islamic epigenetic rejection of Hellenistic precedent as to this one planetary gender that helped make the early modern Persianate Enlightenment so thoroughly Platonic, Pythagorean, and imperially theurgic in classic Iamblichean style.<sup>119</sup> And following Proclus, many Muslim philosophers and dynasts invoked both Moon (‘Alī) and Sun (Muḥammad and Jesus) as the cosmic Twin Lights of *gnōsis*. Yet in modern historiography and national iconography, equally Sunburnt, Islam can only be a Moon religion of the female Orient, especially to be ignored in matters of Science and State; the Islamic Enlightenment that scientifically and politically defined so much of Afro-Eurasian early modernity has thereby been fully eclipsed.

This magical colonialist-Orientalist narrative of permanent Eclipse begs to be *partycrashed* too. Here the Moon and Hermes, led by Goddess Venus, teach us how to Riddle, how to Debate, how to play a Twaining Trick on so self-serious Euroheliocentrism.<sup>120</sup> And the playlist of that partycrashing is all *jazz*: in its Islamic and a great host of other cultural riffs, this ever-shifting play of cosmic opposites does not merely resist static, centrist resolution, but revels in endlessly edge-of-the-precipice possibility.<sup>121</sup>

Let us unplayfully pin the dead butterfly to the museum display and concede that Islam is a religion of the Moon: by the logic of this Hellenistic-Christian debate, Persianate planetary theurgy—equally Platonic-Pythagorean and Harranian-Hermetic, and above all Iamblichean—can only be sheerest *Neopaganism*. Worse, as is well-documented, among its central astro-magical rites is the Drawing Down of the Moon, emblem of perverse *female* magic from Plato to the Euro-American present. Worst of all, *mageia* by pagan Greek definition is originally a perversion native to a magically even more pagan *Persia*.<sup>122</sup> *Q.E.D.*: Persianate Islam is the original Wicca, and must be respected by historians as such, lest they be found guilty of Inquisitorial, chauvinist, anti-Pagan misogyny.

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119. I propose Iamblichus’s relationship to Julian as a useful model for understanding Ibn Turka’s to Iskandar Sulṭān; see Matthew Melvin-Koushki, “The New Brethren of Purity.” In this Greater Western context, Ficino’s status as the neoclassicizing father of Latin Neoplatonism and “Hermeticism” and Iamblichean theurgy through a Heliocentric lens only is wonderfully instructive.

120. My thanks again to Emily Selove for this inspiration.

121. My thanks to CJ Uy for this equally Hermetic inspiration. See his forthcoming “Riffing on/as the Real: Towards Jazz as a Framework for Medieval Sufism”; and *Lost in a Sea of Letters: Sa’d al-Dīn Ḥamūya and the Plurality of Sufi Knowledge* (Leiden: Brill, 2025). Uy’s jazz-lettrist riffing on Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Fumi Okiji’s work in particular could not be more Hermes-ruled—both celebrating the West African Yoruba Ifa *orisha* Esu as Trickster god: tall and short, young and old, double-gendered and double-headed. As Okiji explains (*Billie’s Bent Elbow: Exorbitance, Intimacy and a Nonsensuous Standard* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2025), 40–41): “They embody a ‘cautionary lesson to humankind not to trust too readily to appearances but to learn to negotiate the infinite possibilities, and thus, the pitfalls of seemingly factual evidence or apparent normality,’ such as that which European ordinary thought most often insists and depends on.”

122. On the etymology of “magic” as Greek anti-Persian slur, hence tantamount to the Latin Christian anti-Greek slur “pagan,” see Hanegraaff, “Magic,” in *The Cambridge Handbook of Western Mysticism and Esotericism*, ed. Glenn Alexander Magee, 393–404 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016). I myself was so misled by Hellenistic-Christian astral gender politics as to misidentify the Moon as female too in my 2018 summary article, where I failed to note Fāṭima’s association rather with Venus; see Melvin-Koushki, “Early Modern Islamic Empire.”

Just joking! Premodern Islam is obviously not a form of Neopaganism, much less Wicca, Eurocentric names by definition. (That said, Wicca does have suggestive Islamic connections, and Thelema, an important source, is thoroughlygoingly Islamophilic.<sup>123</sup>) Yet post-Mongol Persianate cultures were ardently Moon-, Sun-, and Venus-worshipping and generally Islamically astrolatrous—an empirical fact that few historians have even acknowledged, much less celebrated, due not least to the still-persistent Protestant missionary allergy to Islamic Magic as suspiciously Pagan.<sup>124</sup>

To Hermetically partycrash the current historiographical orthodoxy, Sunblinded to the historical prevalence of Islamic imperial Selenicism in particular, and stone-deaf to its jazz, I conclude with a classic Persianate operation to Draw Down the Moon (*taskhīr-i qamar*).<sup>125</sup>

Significantly of Mongol-era vintage, this operation features prominently in *The Stars That Are the Sciences (Nujūm al-‘ulūm)*, a comprehensive Persian encyclopedia composed in 1570 in ‘Adilshahi Bijapur by the Twelver Shi‘i ruler ‘Alī ‘Ādilshāh (r. 1558–79) himself. Nor is that title a mere rhetorical flourish: even more than its Safavid, Mughal, and Ottoman peers, the encyclopedia is systematically astrolatrous. (That Maḥmūd Dihdār—whose more famous son Muḥammad sojourned at ‘Alī ‘Ādilshāh’s court—opened his summary grimoire *Compendium of Best Practices (Javāmi‘ al-favā’id)* with a letrist analysis of this ruler’s name is likewise telling.)<sup>126</sup> Comprising 53 sciences according to the original plan, only ten chapters are extant in the three surviving manuscript copies. Yet even in incomplete form, it stands as a gorgeous epitome of Persianate Enlightenment culture on three counts: its scientific-technological framework is primarily astral-magical; it is by far the most lavishly illustrated book of the early modern Persianate era, to ensure operational accuracy; it is the most systematically ecumenical marriage of Islamic with Indic occult science produced before the seventeenth century, with Persian and Sanskrit as epistemic equals.<sup>127</sup> In this it not only prefigures immediately subsequent Mughal developments, but helped provoke them, and serves as a summa of sixteenth-century Irano-Indic imperial Star Science in its

123. Gerald Gardner’s (d. 1964) stint as a colonial administrator and amateur anthropologist in Malaysia is occasionally discussed in Hutton, *The Triumph of the Moon*. But Aleister Crowley’s (d. 1947) embrace of Persianate sexual ambiguity and poetic homoeroticism as proof of Islamic virility against Christian passivity is here more suggestive; see Marco Pasi, “Aleister Crowley and Islam,” in *Esoteric Transfers and Constructions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam*, ed. Mark Sedgwick and Francesco Piraino, 151–93 (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021).

124. And when this fact has been acknowledged, it is often to condemn; a *locus classicus* is Manfred Ullmann, *Die Natur- und Geheimwissenschaften im Islam* (Leiden: Brill, 1972). The modern Protestant missionary obsession with Islam as “animism” and hence “magic” is epitomized by Samuel Zwemer (d. 1952), whose monomaniacal demonization campaign helped define Islam’s categorization in the United States Library of Congress.

125. That *taskhīr* is a term of power literally meaning “subjugation,” whose root meaning (*s-kh-r*) is to make mockery of, resonates nicely with our Hermetically partycrashing theme here. On its function as a less polemical synonym for “magic” by the early modern era, see Lillian McCabe, “Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī’s (d. 606/1210) *Book of the Hidden Secret* and Its Reception” (PhD diss., Yale University, 2024), ch. 3.

126. Matthew Melvin-Koushki, “Dehdār Šīrāzi,” *Encyclopaedia Iranica Online*, July 29, 2016.

127. The ancient Greco-Roman association of the Moon-subjugating Witches of Thessaly with the Brahmins of India is especially piquant in this context.

own right, rewritten in astro-lettrist and hence Selenocentric terms. More: *The Stars* makes Mercury as Budha the son of God Moon.<sup>128</sup>

The dynastic context of this encyclopedia's production is similarly Selenically-Hermetically instructive. Upon 'Alī 'Ādilshāh's death, Chānd Bībī (d. 1600), his wife, took power, and her military exploits against the Mughals earned her fame as Queen of the Deccan to this day.<sup>129</sup> As should now be obvious, their royal names were designed to be read together as a simple Islam-in-India imperial riddle: the marriage of 'Alī, King of the Balance (Arabic-Persian), to Chānd, God Moon (Sanskrit-Persian), makes a legendary power couple in Hellenic and Vedic terms; that Chānd was physically Warrior Queen and female World-Changer too only doubled that Twaining synergy.

And here Hermes invites us to play another hilariously Joycean Game of History: Why not take this early modern Deccan drawing down of the Panopticonic, Panacean, West-East, Male-Female Moon as a Tricky metaphor—and metaphors are transporting *magic*—for whatever it is that astro-algorithmic, Star-Warring, Space-colonial, and weirdly Witchy modernity might mean or Change today?



*Drawing Down the Moon: The Method of Imam Muḥammad [son of] Sirāj al-Dīn Sakkākī*<sup>130</sup>

If you would draw down the Moon, spend three days walking around [in search of] a house with plastered walls, then enter it, and in the plaster draw a mandala (*mandal*, magic circle) and further plaster its field, then draw in it five lines [to make a square encompassing the circle]. Then take a rod of pomegranate wood and inscribe on it this talisman in green ink, then cast it into the mandala with four *manns* of silver and place four silver knives at the head of each line. [These preparations completed, for the duration of the operation] burn incense and recite this incantation twice a day

128. Despite its outside importance, the only study of the *Nujūm al-ʿulūm* to date is Emma Flatt, *The Courts of the Deccan Sultanates: Living Well in the Persian Cosmopolis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), ch. 5; on the Moon-Mercury parent-child relationship, see p. 210.

129. Sarah Waheed, "Whatever Happened to Chand Bibi Sultan? Narratives of a Deccan Warrior Queen," *South Asia* 47, no 3. (2024): 616–33.

130. *Nujūm al-ʿulūm*, Dublin, Chester Beatty Library, MS In. 02 (copied 1570), 348 fols., fol. 114a–b. On Sakkākī (d. 1229) and his *Comprehensive Book for Making the Complete and Perfected Human (Kitāb al-Shāmil wa-baḥr al-kāmil)*, see Emily Selove and Geoffrey Humble's volume of studies, *A Sorcerer's Handbook: Medieval Arabic Magic in Context* (Leiden: Brill, 2026), particularly Supriya Gandhi and Travis Zadeh's "From India to Syria and Back Again: Demons, Deities, and the Mysterious Vocabulary of Islamic Incantations" in the latter. A similar operation occurs in the *Shāmil*, section 50.1–2; see Sakkākī, *The Science of the Mighty Talismans in The Book of the Complete*, ed. and trans. Emily Selove and Luca Patrizi (Leiden: Brill, 2026). That this seminal Mongol-era grimoire, uniquely, opens with the Moon (*muṣḥaf al-qamar*) is likewise telling; cf. the *Ghāya* Moon operation translated above (n. 62). Although now far more historiographically celebrated, Theosophy was a late-comer to this Indic table by some two centuries and for British reasons reflexively excluded Islam from South Asia—a painfully ironic colonialist fiction that continues to wreak modern nationalist destruction of Muslim bodies and books as we speak.

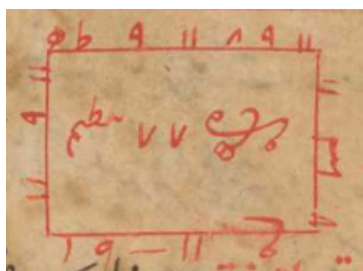
and twice a night, exiting the mandala before dawn, invoking the five names below through your breath. In each of the twice daily rounds recite them 161 times, burning five measures of incense each time; do the same at night, though be sure the incense burns till dawn. During the nightly invocations of the Moon, it is best if you can either observe His light through a window or directly. Stand and invoke whenever you see Him, and sit when He sets.

The duration of this drawing-down operation is 140 days. On the 103rd day, you will see the whole world suffused with intense light, and whenever you make ritual ablution your ablution water will turn to silver and pearlescent anything it touches by the power of God the All-Majestic. All creatures will love you and envy not your prosperity and wellbeing, and all shall apply to you to meet their needs, and you will be able to discern their true intentions, and all shall affirm [your authority].

Even in your dreams you will find the ground and even your very clothes to be made of pearls, which you may give to anyone you wish upon waking. But you will also have nightmares that will terrify you and cause you to weep, in which event the Moon will know [of your terror] and raise the veil separating earth from heaven, by leave of God Most Mighty and Majestic. You will thus come to behold the Moon by night and day alike, and He too will behold you, and you will become Lover and Beloved, such that the entire world will be powerless to rise against you and can be instantly destroyed at your wish. All scientists (*‘āqilān*) attest these to be the benefits of this [operation].

Once the veil is lifted, the Moon will come to take His seat on a throne in a form so beautiful as to be impossible to behold. Taking your hand, He will then exit the mandala, and seat you on the throne in His place, and hand you His own talisman, which you will take and wipe across your eyes—and your life will be extended by 80 years, and if you are old you will become young again. This talisman, also white with green lettering, features the Names of God as compact, so show it to no one and keep it hidden.

This is the talisman:



These are the five names you must recite and keep on your breath, that no harm afflict: *O ʿĪṭaras, O ʿAymhuvas, O Jamhūṭyāsh, O ʿAraṭmūsh, O Ḥasmiyash!*

These are the [proper] incenses: white sandalwood, fresh narcissus, white mastic, poppy husk, seafoam, ben seed, and saffron. It is imperative that their proportions be equal and that they be of a uniform color when compounded, to be done freshly each time.

The form of the mandala of conjuration:



And this is the incantation of drawing-down:

*In the name of God, All-Merciful, Ever-Merciful! I invoke You, O King, Munificent, Bestower of Mercy and Success to Your servants, by office of O ‘Adnūsh, O ‘Arṭafash, O Qarhūṭash, O Jayharmash, O Shahīdanāsh! I invoke You, O Lord Ever-Merciful, Who sets in motion all from eternity, by office of ‘Aylūtarīs, Shalhū‘amīsh, Ṭanṭīnāsh, Hajlamash, Ṭarṭūfyāsh, Żalīnūs! Answer my prayer, O Hārīsh and Za‘ānūsh, by the might of these mighty names, and by Your own right!*<sup>131</sup>

131. Note that all these jinn servitor names are derived by lettrist means, presumably a series of magic squares, not given here, associated with the Moon; on the evolution of Lunar *awfāq*, see Bink Hallum, “New Light on Early Arabic *Awfāq* Literature,” in *Islamicate Occult Sciences in Theory and Practice*, ed. Liana Saif, Francesca Leoni, Matthew Melvin-Koushki, and Farouk Yahya, 57–161 (Leiden: Brill, 2021). Cf. the Moon-subjugation ritual in Fakhr al-Dīn Rāzī’s *Hidden Secret (al-Sirr al-maktūm)*, which became a bestselling grimoire of the early modern Persianate world: though much longer and more detailed than any other planetary-subjugation ritual there, signifying the Moon’s status as King and Doorway to all the other planets, it works by establishing a total Moon-consciousness, rather than Islamically-Vedically actually drawing down the Moon to Earth by means of a mandala, as here. See Noble, *Philosophising the Occult*, 270–76; Travis Zadeh, *Wonders and Rarities: The Marvelous Book That Traveled the World and Mapped the Cosmos* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2023), 278–82.

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