Borrower: EMU

Lending String: *DCU,FUG,TJC,JHE,NDD, TXA, VA@, UUM, AZU

Patron: COOK, HAMILTON

Journal Title: Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes.

Volume: 73 Issue: 1981 Pages: 33-45

Article Author: William C. Chittick

Article Title: Sultan Burhan al-Din’s Sufi Correspondence.

Imprint: Wien; A. Holder; New York; B. Wester

Call #: PJ5.W64

Location: CU: Semitics Non-circ

Mail
Charge
Maxcost: 35.00/IFM

Shipping Address:
ILL--BORROWING
EMORY UNIVERSITY--WODDRUFF MAIN LIBRARY
540 ASBURY CIRCLE, NE
ATLANTA Georgia 30322-2870 United States

Fax: Ariel preferred
Ariel: 170.140.164.188

ILL Number: 115592180

---

1 Actes 499—505, und DERS., The Qur’an and Belief in a „High God“, Der Islam 56 (1979) 205—211.

---

SULTAN BURHÂN AL-DÎN’S SUFI CORRESPONDENCE

By William C. Chittick, Woodbury, Conn.

Qâdi Burhân al-Dîn Ahmad ibn Muḥammad is well-known to scholars of Turkish history and literature as the sultan of Sivas, from 783/1381—2 until his death in ca. 801/1398, and as an important early poet1. Although it is known that he also wrote two works in Arabic, until now no one has pointed out the relevance of one of these works to the development of the School of Ibn al-ʿArabî, nor has anyone discovered his Arabic correspondence with another member of that school.

Sultan Burhân al-Dîn was born on 3 Ramadan 745/8 January 1345 into a family of ’ulamâ in Kayserî, where his father, Shams al-Dîn Muḥammad, was qâdi. At the age of 14 he traveled with his father to Cairo to pursue advanced studies in the sciences of the day. While there he heard that Qutb al-Dîn al-Râzî had come to Damascus. Al-Râzî (d. 776/1374—5), an outstanding philosopher and theologian, is the author of many works, among them his famous Muḥkamât or “Trials”, in which he judges between the commentaries of Naṣîr al-Dîn al-Ṭâṣâfî and Fakhr al-Dîn al-Râzî on the Ishârât wa-l-tanbihât of Ibn Sinâ. Burhân al-Dîn went to Damascus and studied with al-Râzî for a year and a half. While there he also studied the principles and philosophy of medicine from Ibn Sinâ’s Canon with one Sayyid Muḥammad al-Nîlî2.

---

2 ASTARÂBÂDÎ, Bezm u rezm, p. 67.
Astarābādī, Burhān al-Dīn’s friend and biographer, notes that while studying with al-Nīlī, Burhān al-Dīn became acquainted with a certain Sufī whom he was to meet again years later when he assumed his father’s position at qaṣīf in Kayseri. In Sultan Burhān al-Dīn’s own words, “God made the existence of that Sufī the cause of my success in the affairs of both this world and the next. He made him my guide upon the Path and the means for my spiritual awakening (these two sentences are evidence that Burhān al-Dīn became his spiritual disciple). This was so true that whenever I was faced with any obstacle, it could be removed by the slightest effort or attentiveness on his part”. The Sufī always used to tell Burhān al-Dīn that one day he would become sultan and accordingly addressed him as “king” (malīk).

Burhān al-Dīn became qaṣīf in Kayseri in 766/1364—5. Eventually he became a vizier, then an atāleg, and finally sultan of the lands of the house of Eretna. But during this whole period he retained his interest in Sufism. In fact, his involvement with the metaphysical speculation of the School of Ibn al-'Arabī seems to have become serious only in the last period of his life when as sultan he was occupied with continual intrigues and campaigns with neighboring states.

In order to understand a little of the background of the type of Sufi speculation with which Burhān al-Dīn concerned himself, it is necessary to recall the importance of certain key figures in Ibn al-'Arabī’s school. Sadr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī (d. 673/1274) was Ibn al-'Arabī’s foremost disciple. He systematized the master’s teachings and trained many students, among them Fakhr al-Dīn Ṭrāqī, author of the Lāma’āt, an exquisite mixture of Persian prose and poetry which summarizes al-Qūnawī’s teachings employing the language of love. A number of commentaries were written on the Lāma’āt, the most famous of which is by ‘Abd al-Rahman Jāmī (d. 888/1482). But probably the earliest was written by ‘Alī al-Dīn Yār-‘Alī Shirāzī, who intersperses his work with long passages quoted from the writings of Ibn al-‘Arabī.

---


7 Qub al-muḥaddiqūn. Al-Qūnawī and his followers refer to their own particular school of Sufism as that of “Verification” (taḥqīq) and to themselves as the “Verifiers”, i.e., those who verify their own findings by gaining an inward vision of the realities of things (ḥaqiqat al-ashqāq) as they exist in God’s own Knowledge of them.

8 A copy of the Fūṣūs in al-Qūnawī’s own handwriting, which was among the works endowed by him at his death, is now preserved in Istanbul in the Türk ve İslam eserleri müzesi, no. 1933. This might be the work referred to, in which case it must only have been loaned to Burhān al-Dīn (technically, as an endowment, it never should have left the mosque at al-Qūnawī’s tomb).
all of them. The hidden things of the worlds of the Unseen and the Visible were shown to his illuminated consciousness."

From this passage we see that Sultan Burhan al-Din must have come under the influence of Yar\'Ali Shirazi, a devoted follower of the teachings of al-Qunawi and his disciples. Other references to Shirazi in the sultan's biography show that he was a trusted member of the court, sometimes even sent on political missions.

Burhan al-Din maintained good relationships with the 'ulama' in general throughout his reign and often participated in debates with them. According to his biographer, he outshone all the scholars of his day. If one can judge from the quality of his works, this is probably not too much of an exaggeration.

In the new Encyclopedia of Islam, Jan Rypka states that Burhan al-Din is the author of two "juridical works." But "of far more importance is the Dina\' of Burhan al-Din, containing over 1500 ghazals...". The poems are concerned mainly with "profane love; mystical notes are sounded more rarely." To call the two prose works "juridical" is misleading to say the least. And whether or not Burhan al-Din was a "mystical" poet may have to be reconsidered in the light of the evidence provided in his Arabic works.

Sultan Burhan al-Din wrote an Arabic treatise entitled Tari\'ih al-ta\'awun in the space of about a year from 798/1396 to 799/1397. Astarabadi explains that "Ubaydallah ibn Mas\'ud al-Bukhari (d. 747/1346–7), known as Sad al-Shar\'iah, wrote a work entitled al-Ta\'awun on Hanafite "Principles of Jurisprudence" (usul al-fiqh, a discipline which is as much philosophical as juridical), and then commented upon his own work in al-Ta\'awun. Sa\'d al-Din al-Ta\'asani (d. 797/1394–5 or 791/1389), the famous theologian, wrote a commentary rejecting the arguments of al-Ta\'awun called al-Tahwii. Burhan al-Din's work sets out to prove that most of al-Ta\'asani's objections and criticisms are groundless.

10 ASTARABADI, pp. 334, 335.
11 I have in mind an analysis of the images and concepts of the poetry along the lines we have followed for \'Iraqi in the introduction to the Divine Flashes.
12 ASTARABADI, pp. 500–503. I was not able to find a manuscript of this work, and in any case its importance must be judged by those familiar with the development of usul al-fiqh.

More important for our purposes is a work which the sultan wrote in a space of twenty days sometime before the above treatise entitled Ik\'ar al-sa\'ad\'at fi as\'ar al-\'ibad\'at ("The elixir of felicities concerning the mysteries of the rites")13. Far from being a juridical work as might be judged from the title, it is one of the most masterly summaries of Sad\' al-Din al-Qunawi's teachings ever written.14. Rypka does point

An excellent manuscript in large and careful thuluth copied by someone who knew Burhan al-Din personally is preserved in the Suleymaniye Library: Ayasofya 1658.

14 Burhan al-Din was not only the sultan ever to concern himself with the works of al-Qunawi. Although not himself the author of treatises on this subject, Mehmet the Conqueror seems to have been fascinated by al-Qunawi's writings. At his request, three commentaries were written on al-Qunawi's key metaphysical work, Miftah al-ghayb. Two of these are in Arabic: Fath miftah al-ghayb, by Muhammad ibn Qutb al-Din al-Iznik, completed in 874/1469–70 (Ayasofya 1932, dated 874; Shehid Ali Paşa 1271, dated 874 — both of these were in part copied from the original —; Cth. 1050, dated 910; Shehid Ali Paşa 272, dated 931; Shehid Ali Paşa 1273, tenth century; Hkn. 478, dated 1070; Topkapı emamet hazinesi 1481); and Shar\'i miftah al-ghayb by al-Qir\'ami, completed in 874/1469 (Halet Ef. 284, collated from the author's copy with the author; Ayasofya 1831). More interesting is the third commentary, Ma\'rifat al-thawq bi\'l rasyb, by Shaykh Ahmad al-Ibn, completed at his sitawya in Edirne in the year 880/1475—6 (Istanbul University E. 304, 373 folio, tenth–eleventh century). After mentioning that he has been ordered to make the commentary by Mehmet, al-Ibn writes, "in accordance with the sultan's command... this noble commentary on this subtle Arabic work will be written in the most graceful of tongues (amalak t alema\'ah), i.e., eloquent Persian."

Sultan Mehmet also ordered al-Qunawi's treatise to be translated into Persian (Ayasofya 2089, from Mehmet's own library; Pertev Paşa 272 m., also perhaps from his library; the card catalogue attributes this copy to Shaykh Ahmad al-Ibn, but the translation is very different from the one in al-Ibn's commentary; Hac. Mahmud Ef. 2610; [Millet Serayee 911/4, a short portion of the work, copied in 1299]. Although there is no mention of Mehmet in this work itself, its translator writes as follows in the introduction to another work (the Persian translation of the first half of al-Kas\'ani's I\'tik\'ad\'at al-\'a\'ifyyah, Ayasofya 1657; the same work without the introduction is attributed by the copyist to al-Qir\'ami, Res. 444/f. 61–93, dated 571/1467): When Sultan Mehmet was inspired to have Miftah al-ghayb translated into Persian, "his blessed glance fell upon this last of his servants... But the command of the sultan, who is obeyed by the whole world, must be obeyed... Necessarily I strove to obey this awesome command... However, since entering into this science of the Profession of Unity depends upon an awareness of the technical
out that it is "held in high esteem even now amongst the 'ulama'," but as is obvious from the content, these 'ulama' can only be of the type sympathetic with Sufism and conversant with Ibn al-'Arabi's teachings. Besides the Arabic, a Turkish translation is also extant.

This work of about 170 folios is divided into two sections, the first an introduction and the second a discussion of the rites. The introduction in turn is divided into three parts, the first of which discusses the nature of "Being" (al-wujūd) following al-Qūnawi closely. The second discusses the order in which things are given existence (tāriḥ al-ḥayāt), and the third God's wisdom (ḥikmah) in bestowing existence upon things. The terminology of the second and third parts of the introduction is based on that of al-Qūnawi and more especially that of his disciple al-Farghānī. The influence of the latter's Muntaha al-madārāk — itself based on lectures given by al-Qūnawi — is strongly in evidence.

Unlike many such attempts at summarizing the doctrine of the "Oneness of Being" (naqdhat al-wujūd), Burhan al-Dīn's introduction is by no means a string of quotations lacking unity and internal harmony. It is a skillful re-presentation and even recreation of a difficult teaching in a vibrant and spontaneous style which could only come from years of constant meditation upon Ibn al-'Arabi's ideas and al-Qūnawi's mode of expression. The fact that Burhan al-Dīn composed the whole work in twenty days confirms the impression of a complete

terms of the shaykhs... it also became incumbent upon me to translate this work (of al-Kashānī)... Therefore I have also translated it..."

In addition, a commentary on al-Qūnawi's al-Nurwa, entitled Kashf al-haqiq min bayn al-daqiq, was dedicated to Mehmet "for his study" (li-ajl mutalla'ah) (Ayasofya 1937). This is the same work, with a different introduction, as Asrār al-surūr bi-kursī alā 'al al-nār by İbrahim ibn İsaq ibn Sulaymān, known as Muṣannif al-Sara'ī (Esad Ef. 259, Oh. 1034 m, Pertev Paşa 292/1, 647/12, Hamidiye 761/5). Mehmet's interest in al-Qūnawi is also illustrated by a copy of the commentary on the Pusya of al-Qūnawi's disciple al-Jandī from Mehmet's own library (Şehid Ali Paşa 1240, dated 869/1464—5).

Published in two volumes in Istanbul, 1293/1876. Al-Farghānī wrote this work originally in Persian, then translated it himself into Arabic. In the Persian text he includes an introduction by al-Qūnawi, who explains that the work is based upon his own lectures. The Persian original, entitled Maqābārī al-darārī, has been printed in Makkah by S. J. Ashāri, 1357/1978. H. Ritter published al-Qūnawi's introduction in Türkiyeat mecmuası, 7—8, p. 27.

assimilation on his part of these complicated Sufi teachings. And his mystery of the subject also suggests that he himself had practiced Sufism for years and had attained to high stages of realization on the Sufi path.

But in many ways more interesting than the first half of the book is the second half, where Burhan al-Dīn discusses in a series of "illuminations" (la'ābah) the mysteries of the basic Muslim rites, such as the canonical prayer and its accompanying ritual purification, fasting, and the pilgrimage. Here Burhan al-Dīn applies al-Qūnawi's metaphysics and cosmology to all the details of the rites, showing how each act manifests transcendental principles and becomes a means whereby man can attain reintegration into his Origin.

In the second section of his work Burhan al-Dīn explains and clarifies in great detail various allusions found in al-Qūnawi's teachings to the fundamental importance of the Sharī'ite ritual for Sufi practice. As far as I have been able to discern, he displays an originality witnessed among only a few of Ibn al-'Arabi's followers. It is possible that this second part of his work is based upon writings of figures with whom I am not familiar. But it is not derived from the works of any of the well-known masters, such as Ibn al-'Arabi, al-Qūnawi, al-Farghānī, al-Jandī, al-Kāshānī, al-Qaṣṣārī or al-Jāfī.

In a recent visit to the Suleymaniye Library in Istanbul, I came across a manuscript of a third Arabic work by Sultan Burhan al-Dīn, his correspondence with a Sufi called "'Alī". Judging from the style and content, it was written at a time when Burhan al-Dīn had already studied the writings of Ibn al-'Arabi and his followers, but had not yet mastered their content to the extent one finds in Asrār al-'ibādāt.

The manuscript is an early one, probably from the ninth/fifteenth century, and is written in a particularly difficult although precise hand lacking most diacritical marks. Burhan al-Dīn's correspondence is preceded by al-Qūnawi's correspondence with Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Tūsī and a number of short letters to and from al-Qūnawi.

17 Ayasofya 2349. Burhan al-Dīn's letters are on ff. 42b—43a and 46b—48a; 'Alī's are on ff. 43b—45b and 48b.
19 Copies of some of these letters are found only in two other manuscripts: Esad Ef. 1783 and Konya Mevlana Müzesi 1633.
Although the copyist has made no note concerning Burhān al-Dīn’s authorship, there are sufficient indications within the text to establish this with certainty. In the second letter the Sufi ‘Alī (who mentions his own name in the fourth letter) addresses his correspondent as “Sultan of Sultans . . . Burhān al-Dīn”, and then proceeds to answer the points raised by Burhān al-Dīn by employing the phrase, “the Sultan says . . .”. He also refers to the sultan’s temporal and spiritual ranks in the following terms: “the perfect one of our age and the caliph of our time, the lieutenant of the prophet, the heir of Murtaḍā, who joins together the two virtues of logical demonstration (burhān) and direct vision (īyān); the holder of the two levels of direct perception and mystical intuition; the member of the ranks of the sultans of the Verifiers; he who has reached the highest horizon of the exalted ones; he who contemplates the lights of those brought nigh; he who is aware of the mysteries of holy angels; the shadow of God in the lands, the sultan of sultans, the demonstration of the world and religion, the helper of Islam and the Muslims . . . may God make his sultanate everlasting and illuminate his demonstration”.

In the third letter of the correspondence, which Burhān al-Dīn wrote to ‘Alī in answer to the second, Burhān al-Dīn quotes a passage from ‘Alī, but in the quote replaces the expression “the sultan says” with “Ahmad says”, thus establishing that his own name is indeed Sultan Burhān al-Dīn Ahmad. Finally, the fact that the content of the correspondence, i.e. its intimate concern with the metaphysics of al-Qūnawi, coincides exactly with the subject matter of parts of Iktīr al-iḥādāt, leaves not the shadow of a doubt as to Burhān al-Dīn’s authorship.

The actual content of these letters would only be of interest to a specialist in the School of Ibn al-’Arabī involved with the intricacies of the works of al-Qūnawi, since the whole discussion of seven folios revolves around the interpretation of a short passage from al-Qūnawi’s Miḥṭāḥ al-ghayb20: Does the Supreme Pen (= the First Intellect) possess knowledge of all things known by God, or only of those things which are predestined for existence in the world? Burhān al-Dīn maintains the second position, while ‘Alī holds the first. Several quotations are assembled from the above work as well as from al-Qūnawi’s other major texts on metaphysics: al-Nuqūṣ, al-Nafḥāt, Taṣfīr al-ḥālāthah and al-Hādiyyah21. References are also made to al-Farghānī’s Muṣṭaḥāb l-ḥadārīk (under the name Sharh al-qāṣīdah, since it is a commentary on a qāṣīdah by Ibn al-Farīd) and al-Kāshānī, the commentator of the Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam.

In his opening letter, Burhān al-Dīn refers to the fact that ‘Alī has interpreted a particular passage in a certain sense. From this we might conclude that ‘Alī was the person with whom Burhān al-Dīn had studied the text. Burhān al-Dīn also refers to the fact that ‘Alī has been intimately involved with these Sufi teachings far longer than himself, thus strengthening the impression one has that ‘Alī was or had been the sultan’s teacher. Then Burhān al-Dīn expresses his dissatisfaction with ‘Alī’s interpretation and proposes his own.

In his answer to letter ‘Alī praises the sultan for his comprehension and profundity and protests that there is nothing he can add to what the sultan has said. “It is a condition of the level of servanthood that I content myself with the sultan’s words . . . as Rūmī has stated in his Mathnawi,

‘Although the king should sit with you on the ground, know your own rank and sit more politely than he’ (II, 341). But since the sultan has indicated orally to his servant that he should write something on this problem . . . , it is incumbent for him to obey.” Then ‘Alī proceeds to enumerate and reject each of Burhān al-Dīn’s arguments.

In the third letter of the series, Burhān al-Dīn in turn rejects each of ‘Alī’s arguments with interesting interpretations of some of the most difficult points of al-Qūnawi’s metaphysics22, and then adds a list of

---

20 This work was published on the margin of its commentary by al-Tanārī, Miṣḥāb al-ins, Tehran, 1323/1905–6.

21 The first three of these works have been published: al-Nuqūṣ, appended to al-Kāshānī’s Sharḥ maqāṣid al-sīrīn, Tehran, 1315/1897–8; also, appended to Ibn Turkab’s Tamhīd al-qawāṣid, Tehran, 1316/1898–9. Al-Nafḥat, Tehran, 1316/1898–9. Taṣfīr al-ḥālāthah, as Jās al-bayān ft taṣfīr waṣn al-qurān, revised edition, Hyderabad–Deccan, 1368/1950; also as Taṣfīr al-ṣūfī l-l-qur’ān, ed. by A. ‘Atṣa, Cairo, 1389/1970. Al-Hādiyyah is al-Qūnawi’s second treatise in his correspondence with al-Ṭūsī (see my article, “Mysticism vs. Philosophy”).

22 The reader can acquire an idea of the type of subjects al-Qūnawi discusses in W. Chittick, “Ṣadra al-Dīn al-Qūnawi on the Oneness of Being”.
other points which corroborates his own view. This is the longest letter of the series.

In the fourth and final letter of the correspondence, the shortest of the series, 'Ali admits that the sultan's interpretation is better than his own and submits to his mastery of the text. One suspects, however, that if Burhan al-Din were not a sultan, 'Ali would not have surrendered so easily — even though without doubt the sultan's arguments do appear much stronger than 'Ali's.

In order to give a better idea of the style and content of the correspondence, I translate below Burhan al-Din's first letter. It has the added virtue of indicating more than the others something of the sultan's personality and the extent of his involvement with Sufism.

Sultan Burhan al-Din's First Letter to 'Ali

In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate

Praise belongs to God, who guides upon the path of true faith; and blessings and peace be upon the best of all who are hidden and visible, and upon his companions, their followers, the pious, and the saints.

Now to come to the subject: My brother in God! You mentioned that a possible-existent (mawakib) which becomes effaced (ta'ayyun) within the Supreme Pen may be such that its existence (in the world) is predestined, or not predestined. Basing yourself upon that, you said that the words of the Shaykh ('al-Qinawi) in his book known as Miftah al-ghayb — where he says that in the Supreme Pen God contemplates all of the possible-objects of Knowledge which will become outwardly manifest in a state of embodiment by outwardly existent forms, etc. 2


2 The passage reads as follows (Miftah al-ins, pp. 166-7): “So through Knowledge of His own Self and through the fact that the level of possible-existence is the eternal object of this very Knowledge, God knows everything which must become manifest within the first level of the bestowal of existence, such as the Supreme Pen. So He makes it all manifest. The situation here on God's part is that He views directly, within the ‘Mist’ (al-'ama), signifying the

— must be read in a certain way. In your interpretation, when he says "مفتاحا أو نحو مفتاح", the word 'مفتاح' must be read with the tashdid.

As for me, although it is encumbent upon me to accept this from you in the manner you have stated it without any objection, since you have proceeded me in entering this science — rather you are one with it in flesh and blood — my long occupation with the exoteric sciences (al-sulam al-rasmiyyah), my habit of not submitting to anything until I verify it for myself, and the fact that the passage itself does not support your contention except after one ignores the literal meaning to an extent which seems farfetched to me, have all prevented me from accepting your words. Then early this morning I was thinking about this problem when there came to my mind from the World of the Unseen through meditation, careful consideration and attentiveness, an indication of the fact that within the Presence of the Supreme Pen what becomes manifest is only that which is meant to come into outward existence. And although the words of the Shaykh point to this where he says, “So the thing which is meant to come into existence becomes manifest within the Supreme Pen,” 24 I do not employ them in my argument because I know that you also find your interpretation within them.

So here I communicate to you what has come to my mind and I present to you what was related to me (from the World of the Unseen). If you find it in harmony with the correct view and in accordance with the findings of the People of Unveiling and Hearts, then something in you has received its image from the mirror of my heart. But if you find it in opposition to that, and you know where its source lies within the

intermediate stage between God Himself and the first level of creation) — since it is the locus-theophany for God's Inward — the first of the manifestations of His Being in the first of its possible (i.e., contingent and created, not Necessary and Eternal) loci-theophany. So He contemplates within that first possible-existient everything that will become manifest from the Mist, i.e., the manifestations of His Knowledge within the ontological forms of the two worlds of the Spirits and the Corporeal-Bodies. In other words (He contemplates there) everything that demands outward-manifestation because of the necessity imposed by His Knowledge of it and (its) fundamental eternality (in His Knowledge), 'whether it is definitely predestined or not predestined' (the translation of this last phrase is problematic; the whole

dimension of the correspondence hinges upon its exact meaning).”

24 Miftah al-ins, p. 295.
parts of my own (existential) plane, it is encumbent upon you to
remedy my shortcomings and save me from slipping.
So these are my words: Without doubt God knows all realities in
that respect where He is free of all conditions (sharâf), but in that
respect no reality is differentiated from any other within His Know-
edge. Within His Unseen Knowledge in that respect even Oneness is
not differentiated from manyness. On the contrary, His Knowledge of
all realities is His Knowledge of His own Self within His own Self.
The entification possessed by God at the level of His Exclusive-
Unity (al-ahadîyyah: where nothing is differentiated from any other
thing) is an entification none other than Nonentification⁵⁰, since it
consists of God on condition that He possess no entification. The
entification within Inclusive-Unity (al-wâhidîyyah) is near to this
entification, although it is different from Nonentification, since it
consists of God on condition that He possess only this amount of
entification: that “one” is one-half of “two”. Without doubt, the
possible realities are not differentiated from one another within these
two levels.
In addition, since the entification possessed by the Level of
Divinity (maâtirbat al-wâhah: the next level after Inclusive-Unity)
comprises Being and Knowledge, within this level and in keeping with
it Oneness and manyness are brought together, both inwardly and
outwardly (that “Being is One” is the basic axiom of this school of
Sufism; and God’s Knowledge embraces multiplicity since He knows
all things). Hence at the Level of Divinity the realities become
differentiated from one another; and the Divine Knowledge comprises
all the realities, both those whose (outward) existence is predestined,
and those whose existence is not predestined.
Then if those realities which became transferred to the Pen were
not those whose existence was desired and predestined and which
became entified expressly for outward manifestation in the world;
rather, if they were all of the possible realities, both those which were
predestined (for existence) and those which were not, this transferal

⁵⁰ Here Burhân al-Dîn seems to diverge from the views of al-Qânawi; and
‘All protests strongly. But in his second letter Burhân al-Dîn makes one of his
most interesting interpretations of al-Qânawi’s writings and maintains that in
fact this is precisely what al-Qânawi is saying.

(from God’s Knowledge to the Pen) would have no purpose. On the
contrary, it would be a repetition. But it has been established among
the Sufis that God does not bring about anything repetitious (amr
mukarrar), since this entails a certain kind of folly (‘ibâd).

Therefore what becomes transferred must be those things whose
existence is desired, but in the manner of “summatized-unity” (îjmûl).
Then these things become deployed in particularized fashion (tafsîl)
within the Tablet, and so on to the last level of existence, just as the
Sufis have mentioned.
The Prophet said, “Verily God said to the Pen, ‘Write!’ It
answered, ‘What shall I write?’ God said, ‘Write My Knowledge of My
creatures, that which is and that which shall be until eternity-without-
card.’” In these words is an indication that what becomes entified
within the Pen is creation, not the uncreated.
In the Sufi saying, “Verily possible-existence is the inkwell of the
All-Merciful”, there is also an indication that one dip of the pen into
the ink, which is the pen’s share from the inkwell, does not include all
the ink within the inkwell, rather only the amount which becomes
written and manifest upon the paper.
All of this with my admission of incapacity and of the fact that
what I possess is the result of following others. Peace upon the saints
of God, upon the best of His servants, and upon you and us. Amen.