ASK Working Paper 24

Abdelkader Al Ghouz

Brokers of Islamic Philosophy in Mamlūk Egypt.
Šams ad-Dīn Maḥmūd b. ʿAbd ar-Raḥmān al-Iṣfahānī (d. 1348) as a Case Study in the Transmission of Philosophical Knowledge through Commentary Writing

ANNEMARIE SCHIMMEL KOLLEG
History and Society during the Mamluk Era (1250 ~ 1517)

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by Abdelkader Al Ghouz

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Among his recent publications are:

- *Vernunft und Kanon in der zeitgenössischen arabisch-islamischen Philosophie: Zu Muḥammad ʿĀbed al-Ǧābirīs (1936-2010) rationalistischer Lesart des Kulturerbes in seinem Werk „Kritik der arabischen Vernunft“*, Würzburg: Ergon 2015.

- "Kontingenzbewältigung als Zügel der Herrschaft: Ibn Taymīyas Herrschaftsverständnis zwischen religiöser Normativität und politischem Pragmatismus," *Das Mittelalter* 20/1 (2015), pp. 47–61.

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Abstract

This working paper summarises the main research results of my research stay as a post-doc research fellow at the Annemarie-Schimmel-Kolleg. The aim of this research project is to cast light on knowledge brokerage between Īlkhānid Tabriz and Mamlūk Cairo during the third reign of the Mamlūk ruler an-Nāṣir Muḥammad (r. 1310-1341). Therefore, it focuses on the Sunni scholar Shams ad-Dīn Maḥmūd Ibn ʿAbd ar-Raḥmān al-Iṣfahānī (d. 749/1348) and his role as a philosophical broker in religious and educational foundations (*Khānqāhs*) devoted in the first place to religious practices of Sufism. This working paper is divided into three parts: 1. the academic setting of the present post-doc research project, 2. a biography of Shams ad-Dīn Maḥmūd al-Iṣfahānī, and 3. an analysis of the text data of my research project from the perspective of both social and intellectual history.[1]

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1. Introduction

My post-doctoral research project examines the role of Shams ad-Dīn Maḥmūd b. ʿAbd ar-Raḥmān al-Iṣfahānī (d. 749/1348) as a broker of philosophical knowledge between Īlkhānid Tabriz and Mamlūk Cairo during the third reign of the Mamlūk ruler an-Nāṣir Muḥammad (r. 1310-1341).[2] Al-Iṣfahānī composed his philosophical commentary *Maṭāliʿ al-anẓār: Sharḥ ṭawāliʿ al-anwār*[3] (Insiders Lights: A Commentary on the Work *The Rising Light*, hereafter *Maṭāliʿ*) sometime between 1336 and 1348[4] in the *khānqah* of the Mamlūk Emir Sayf ad-Dīn Qawṣūn an-Nāṣirī (d. 1341) and presented it as a gift to the Mamlūk Sultan an-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qalāwūn during the latter's third reign.[5] Al-Iṣfahānī's *Maṭāliʿ* is a commentary on ʿAbd Allāh al-Bayḍāwī's (d. 716/1316)[6] work entitled *Ṭawāliʿ al-anwār min maṭāliʿ al-anẓār* (The Rising Light from far Horizons, hereafter *Ṭawāliʿ*). The rich content of this work, its impact on prominent scholars of the Mamlūk and early Ottoman periods, and the high number of sub-commentaries and glosses on the *Maṭāliʿ* have instigated my interest in this text.[7] The present working paper summarizes this author's central ideas and my research project's conclusions.

Al-Bayḍāwī composed his concise work *Ṭawāliʿ* in Tabriz between the years 681/1282 and 716/1316.[8] The foundational text *(matn) Ṭawāliʿ* consists of an introduction and three parts. The introduction provides epistemological principles and discusses 1. Aristotle's theory of demonstrative knowledge developed by this philosopher in his *Posterior Analytics* and 2. Ibn Sīnā's (*lat*. Avicenna/d. 428/1037) reception of the Aristotelian *Posterior Analytics* in his work *kitāb al-Burhān* (Demonstration). The first part of *Ṭawāliʿ* entitled "Potential Beings" *(al-mumkināt)* is devoted to the study of the physical world. In his work *Ṭawāliʿ*, al-Bayḍāwī

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[2] For the engagement of an-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qalāwūn with religious scholars through establishing solid patronage systems see, for instance, al-Harithy, "The Patronage of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad Ibn Qalāwūn," 219-244.

[3] Al-Iṣfahānī: *Maṭāliʿ al-anẓār*, with ʿAbd Allāh al-Bayḍāwī's text, *Ṭawāliʿ al-anwār min maṭāliʿ al-anẓār*, and ash-Sharīf al-Jurjānī's gloss on the *Maṭālī*. For the English translation of both the *Maṭāliʿ al-anẓār* and the *Ṭawāliʿ al-anwār* see, Calverley et al. (trans.), *Nature, Man and God in Medieval Islam*. For my current post-doc research project, I collected 10 copies by different libraries from around the world. Seven of them are complete and of a good *Naskh*. Fortunately, these manuscripts entail both the foundational text *(matn)*, al-Iṣfahānī's commentary along with a sub-commentary written by as-Sayyid ash-Sharīf al-Jurjānī (d. 816/1413) and three glosses by unknown authors.

[4] Neither chronicles nor biographical dictionaries provide historical evidences with regard to the question when al-Iṣfahānī should have composed the *Maṭāliʿ*. However, it is possible to define an approximate dates of the genesis of the *Maṭāliʿ*. I claim that al-Iṣfahānī composed the *Maṭāliʿ* sometime between 1336 and 1348. I used the years 1336 and 1348 as date and time parameters because the *Maṭāliʿ* was composed in the *khānqah* of Sayf ad-Dīn Qawṣūn and there is no evidence about the question whether al-Iṣfahānī gave the *Maṭāliʿ* to an-Nāṣir Muḥammad's lifetime (d. 1341). Therefore the date of al-Iṣfahānī's death (d. 1348) is indicated in the present study as a defining date and date parameter.

[5] Al-Iṣfahānī: *Maṭāliʿ al-anẓār*, 3.

[6] In the bio-bibliographical sources, there is no evidence about the date of al-Bayḍāwī's birth. There is only a minor reference explaining that he was born in a village names al-Bayḍā – near Shiraz – before his family moved permanently to Shiraz. Like van Ess, W. Montgomery Watt concludes that al-Bayḍāwī died probably in 1308 or 1316. See van Ess, "Das Todesdatum des Baidawi," 261-270; Watt: *Islamic Philosophy and Theology*, 137.

[7] For a detailed hand-list of commentaries on *Maṭāliʿ al-anwār fī l-manṭiq* see Wisnovsky, "The Nature and Scope," 177.

[8] This inaccurate timeframe is due to the fact that bio-bibliographical dictionaries do not provide us with a detailed survey of his works. From these sources, one knows that al-Bayḍāwī's scholarly activities began after his trip to Tabriz in 1282.

analyses the relationship between the physical and the mental world focusing on two scholarly figures as representative of two competitive philosophical concepts: 1. Ibn Sīnā as a representative figure of the Aristotelian determinism, and 2. Fakhr ad-Dīn ar-Rāzī (d. 606/1210) as a representative figure of *falsafa-kalām* phenomenalism.[9] In the *Ṭawāliʿ*, this discussion is conducted in the section about substance and accident *(al-jahwar wa-l-ʿaraḍ)*. The main theme of the second part that is entitled "God's Essence and Attributes" *(al-ilāhiyyāt)* is about how one could proof the existence of God *(ithbāt wujūd aṣ-ṣāniʿ)* through the rational analysis of the physical. In the third part of the *Ṭawāliʿ* entitled "Prophecies" *(an-nubuwwāt)*, al-Bayḍāwī is concerned with the debate on prophetic and philosophical knowledge, Imamate, practical theology and the last day. This tripartite structure characterized the post-classical *falsafa-kalām* tradition that the Sunni Muslim theologian and philosopher Fakhr ad-Dīn ar-Rāzī[10] advanced through his work *al-Mulakhkhaṣ fī l-ḥikma* (The Compendium of Philosophy and Logic).[11] The main character of this scholarly tradition of philosophical theology was the fact that it was more ontologically and less theologically oriented.[12] In his article entitled *From al-Ghāzālī to al-Rāzī*, Ayman Shihadeh compares ar-Rāzī's impact on the evolution of *kalām* to Ibn Sīnā's influence in philosophy. In this regards Shihadeh states:

> Al-Rāzī's place in later Muslim theology is somewhat comparable to that of Ibn Sīnā in *falsafa*. For it appears that almost all later theology, that of proponents and opponents alike, was done *vis-à-vis* his philosophical theology.[13]

Due to the compact style of the *Ṭawāliʿ* in which al-Bayḍāwī did not thoroughly mention his references, the act of understanding the *Ṭawāliʿ* is very complicated for readers who are unfamiliar with Avicennian determinism and Rāzian phenomenalism to comprehend the subject, the lines of reasoning and the implicit cross-references of *Ṭawāliʿ*. Therefore, al-Iṣfahānī pointed in his commentary *Maṭāliʿ* clearly out to whom does a work or a theory belongs in the *Ṭawāliʿ*. Unlike al-Bayḍāwī's intended audience, al-Iṣfahānī's readers seem to need more orientation in reading the text being commented on. This is evident because al-Bayḍāwī and al-Iṣfahānī composed their works in different socio-political contexts and *falsafa-kalām* traditions, having different motivations and intended audiences in mind.

Based on some preliminary research results of my post-doc research project, the following article is divided into three parts. The first part aims at situating the present research project in the current academic milieu. The second part provides a biography of Maḥmūd b. ʿAbd ar-Raḥmān al-Iṣfahānī. The third part is devoted to the study of al-Iṣfahānī's commentary *Maṭāliʿ* from two different perspectives: 1. from the perspective of social history, and 2. from

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[9] See Ibrahim, "Fakhr ad-Dīn al-Rāzī," 379-431.

[10] For a detailed introduction into the works and thought of Fakhr ad-Dīn ar-Rāzī's work see, for instance, Shihadeh, "From al-Ghazālī to al-Rāzī," 141-179; idem., *The Teleological Ethics of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī*; Griffel, "On Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's Life,", 379-431; Jaffaer, *Rāzī*.

[11] Eichner, "Dissolving the Unity of Metaphysics," 139-197; Ibrahim, "Fakhr ad-Dīn al-Rāzī," 417.

[12] Heidrun Eichner outlined in her *Habilitationsschrift* the development of Islamic theology towards an ontological approach that began with the theologian and philosopher Fakhr ad-Dīn ar-Rāzī. See idem., *The Post-Avicennian Philosophical Tradition and Islamic Orthodoxy*. For the influence of science and philosophy on *kalām*, see for instance Sabra, "Science and Philosophy in Medieval Islamic Theology," 1-42; van Ess, *Die Erkenntislehre des ʿAḍuḍaddīn al-Īcī*.

[13] Shihadeh, "From al-Ghazālī to al-Rāzī," 179.

the perspective of intellectual history. In doing so, I will demonstrate how the integration of al-Iṣfahānī into two Sufi foundations (*Khānqāh*s) contributed to the transmission of philosophical knowledge in spheres that were devoted in the first place to religious and educational practices of Sufism.

2. Academic Context of the Present Post-Doc Research Project

Researchers of Islamic philosophy agreed till the end of the twentieth century that the Sunni Muslim philosopher Abū Ḥāmid al-Ġazālī (d. 505/1111) inflicted a mere *coup de grace* to Islamic philosophy.[14] A pioneer of this assumption was Ernest Renan who argued in his book *Averroes et l'Averroïsme*[15] that Muslim scholars adopted al-Ġazālī's "anti-philosophical" attitude and rejected, in turn, Averroes' fascination for philosophy.[16] Another pioneer of the alleged "disappearance" of Islamic philosophy from the 12th century onwards was Ignaz Golziher who claimed that al-Ġazālī's work *Tahāfut al-falāsifa* (The Incoherence of the Philosophers)[17] marked the beginning of the end of Islamic philosophy in Islamic intellectual history.[18] William Montgomery Watt asserted that after al-Ġazālī's work *Tahāfut al-falāsifa* Islamic intellectual history was characterized by an ever-growing trend towards religious studies and *kalām* on the one hand and a widespread and growing "hostility" towards philosophy on the other.[19]

However, during the last two decades, there have been many innovative and critical studies that challenged the concept of the disappearance of Islamic philosophy and the "little originality" of Islamic intellectual history at large after the death of al-Ġazālī.[20] Dimitri Gutas, for instance, has questioned in his paper entitled *The Heritage of Avicenna: The Golden Age of Arabic Philosophy, 1100- ca. 1359*, the assumed disappearance of Islamic philosophy mentioned above.[21] This was the first critical study that coined the notion of "The Golden Age of Arabic Philosophy" from the 12th up till mid-fourteenth century.[22] Frank Griffel, for

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[14] In contemporary scholarship, the claim that Islamic intellectual history entered into a phase of "intellectual stagnancy" after the death of al-Ġazālī is long considered as out-dated. See, for instance, Gutas, "The Heritage of Avicenna"; idem., "The Study of Arabic Philosophy in the Twentieth Century," 5–25; Wisnovsky, "The Nature and Scope"; Sabra, "The Appropriation and Subsequent"; Griffel: "'... and the killing of someone'" 226.

[15] Renan, *Averroès et l'Averroïsme*.

[16] The distinction between al-Ġazālī as a symbol of "irrationalism" and Averroes as the "real embodiment" of enlightening thought has become more popular in contemporary Arab thought through the work of the Moroccan philosopher Muḥammad ʿĀbed al-Jābirī (d. 2010) in his voluminous work *Naqd al-ʿaql al-ʿarabī* (Critique of Arab Reason). See, for instance Al Ghouz, *Vernunft und Kanon*.

[17] Al-Ġazālī, *Tahāfut al-falāsifa*.

[18] Goldziher, "Stellung der alten islamischen Orthodoxie zu den antiken Wissenschaften."

[19] Watt, *Islamic Philosophy and Theology*, 117. For a detailed description of some prominent figures that advanced the mainstream of the alleged disappearance of Arabic philosophy after the death of al-Ġazālī see, for instance, Griffel, *Al-Ghazali's Philosophical Theology*, 3-17.

[20] The list of well-funded studies that challenged the disappearance of Arabic philosophy after the death of al-Ġazālī is long. See, for instance, Reisman (ed.), *Before and after Avicenna*; McGinnis (ed.), *Interpreting Avicenna*; Griffel, *Al-Ghazālī's Philosophical Theology*; Shihadeh, *The Teleological Ethics of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī*; Heichner, *The Post-Avicennian Philosophical Tradition and Islamic Orthodoxy*; El-Rouayheb, *Relational Syllogism*; Fancy, *Science and Religion in Mamluk Egypt*; Langermann (ed.), *Avicenna and His Legacy*.

[21] Gutas, "The Heritage of Avicenna," 84.

[22] Further research studies were conducted based on this notion. See, for instance, Langermann (ed.), *Avicenna and His Legacy*.

instance, asserts in his article entitled *"'... and the killing of someone who upholds these convictions is obligatory!' Religious Law and the Assumed Disappearance of Philosophy in Islam"* that:

> The same applies to philosophy. Certain intellectual circles in Islam have frowned upon, shunned, and stigmatized the study of philosophy. Other circles, however, favoured it, encouraged philosophers to write books, and rewarded them for it. There is clear evidence that even after al-Ghazālī there were enough of the later circles to safeguard that philosophy in Islam did not disappear after 1100. At the beginning of this chapter, I tried to show that after al-Ghazālī there were still quite a number of philosophers, who were Muslims, who followed Avicenna, and who taught, for instance, the pre-eternity of the world. In my field of study, that is Islamic studies, has given a wrong impression about this in the past one-hundred and sixty years since the appearance of Ernest Renan's 'Averroes et l'Averroïsme' it is now high time to rectify this mistake.[23]

Unlike Dimitri Gutas, who characterizes the period between 1100 and 1350 CE as the "Golden Age of Arabic philosophy", George Saliba who produced a large number of works on *kalām* atomism between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries, consider the period mentioned above as the "Golden Age of Arabic Astronomy".[24] If one looks closer at the new published works on Islamic philosophy during the early middle period in general and on the reception of Ibn Sīnā in the Post-Ġazālian period in particular, one realizes that contemporary researchers of Islamic intellectual history challenged by the end of the twentieth century a scholarly tradition that characterized the field of Islamic studies between the mid-nineteenth century and the end of the twentieth century.

I consider my on-going post-doc research project as a part of this revisionist research tradition that attempts – in terms of case studies – to break with the Renanian scholarly tradition.

3. Shams ad-Dīn Maḥmūd b. ʿAbd ar-Raḥmān al-Iṣfahānī: A Biography

The present introduction of Shams ad-Dīn Maḥmūd b. ʿAbd ar-Raḥmān al-Iṣfahānī aims to cast light on two key aspects that are central for understanding the socio-political and intellectual prehistory of *Ṭawāliʿ* and *Maṭāliʿ*. These are: 1. al-Iṣfahānī's scholarly and socio-political networks in their changing settings; e.g. starting from al-Iṣfahānī's native town Isfahan[25], to Tabriz, to Damascus and finally to Cairo, and 2. his writings from the perspective of their intertextuality, scholarly interests and developments. Al-Iṣfahānī's life is well documented in biographical dictionaries where one can find not only mere bio- and bibliographical information about him but also dates of exact certainty with regard to his travels, scholarly activities, and public offices. This accurate record of al-Iṣfahānī's social and

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[23] Griffel, "'... and the killing of someone'," 226.
[24] Saliba, *A history of Arabic Astronomy.*
[25] There are two forms of spelling the name of the city Isfahan in Arabic: Iṣfahān or Iṣbahān. In Persian, it is Iṣfahān. I have chosen to use al-Iṣfahānī because the name's author is spelled with 'f' in the manuscript I am studying in this research.

scholarly life demonstrates the intellectual and political meaning of the former.

Shams ad-Dīn Mahmḥūd b. ʿAbd ar-Raḥmān al-Iṣfahānī was born in 674/1276 in Isfahan. He was raised in a family known for its long scientific tradition. He studied *uṣūl ad-dīn* with his father ʿAbd ar-Raḥmān b. Aḥmad (d. ?), who was one of the students of ʿAbd Allāh al-Bayḍāwī in Tabriz. The exact time period during which al-Iṣfahānī's father studied with al-Bayḍāwī, remains unclear. The only clue available is that al-Iṣfahānī was a child when his father moved to Tabriz. Though it was common in Islamic intellectual history that a son accompanied his father to open lectures, and though al-Iṣfahānī praised al-Bayḍāwī's scholarly duties in the *Maṭāliʿ*,[26] there is no evidence in biographical dictionaries confirming whether al-Bayḍāwī gave al-Iṣfahānī an *ijāza* or whether the latter attended a lecture given by ʿAbd Allāh al-Bayḍāwī at all. Based on the analysed sources, one can state that the relationship between al-Iṣfahānī and al-Bayḍāwī was indirect. His father, ʿAbd ar-Raḥmān b. Aḥmad, was the intersection between al-Bayḍāwī and al-Iṣfahānī. ʿAbd ar-Raḥmān b. Aḥmad received an *ijāza* from al-Bayḍāwī and attended lectures by the latter. He taught his son al-Iṣfahānī, and gave him an *ijāza* in *ḥadīth*.[27] Though there is no historical evidence available with regard to a direct relationship between al-Iṣfahānī and al-Bayḍāwī, both belonged – as shown by Josef van Ess – to Rashīd ad-Dīn's (d. 718/1318) scholarly network in Tabriz.[28] Like al-Iṣfahānī who was a student of al-Bayḍāwī's student, the theologian ʿAḍud ad-Dīn al-Ījī (d. 756/1355) was also a student of one of al-Bayḍāwī's students, namely of Aḥmad b. al-Ḥasan Fakhr ad-Dīn b. Yūsuf al-Jārbardī (d. 746/1345) who was known as an expert in Arabic grammar and language.[29] Therefore, both were students of two different students of al-Bayḍāwī. This remark is of significant importance for understanding the prehistory of al-Iṣfahānī's commentary *Maṭāliʿ* and al-Ījī's work al-*Mawāqif*. Both works were completed in the 1330ies; and both authors are concerned with a question that represents the principal question of al-Bayḍāwī's work *Ṭawāliʿ*. This question is whether one could acquire knowledge about God through the study of natural phenomena. In other words, al-Iṣfahānī, al-Ījī and their teachers' teacher al-Bayḍāwī, are concerned with the question of whether one could learn something about God, His acting in the world and His attributes without revelation. The meta-level of this question is whether priority should be given to reason over revelation in the case of their contradiction.

Due to the wide range of his educational training, al-Iṣfahānī had different teachers in different regions of the "Islamicate"[30] world. With his brother Awḥad ad-Dīn b. ʿAbd ar-

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[26] Al-Iṣfahānī, *Maṭāliʿ al-anẓār*, 3.

[27] For the chain of an *ijāzāt* that al-Bayḍāwī gave to ʿAbd ar-Raḥmān b. Aḥmad, the latter to his son al-Iṣfahānī, the latter to the religious scholar Aḥmad b. Abd ar-Raḥmān al-Mawṣilī (d. ?), and the latter to the religious scholar ʿImād ad-Dīn al-Amhirī (d. ?) see al-Bayḍāwī, *al-Ġāya al-quṣwā*, 81-82.

[28] See, for example, van Ess, *Der Wesir und seine Gelehrten*, 24.

[29] Idem., *Die Erkenntislehre des ʿAḍudaddīn al-Īcī*, 35.

[30] In this working paper, I am borrowing the term 'Islamicate' from Marshall Hodgon. Hodgon used the term 'Islamicate' without referring directly to Islam as a source for identity, but rather as "(…) the social and cultural complex historically associated with Islam and the Muslims, both among Muslims themselves and even when found among non-Muslims". Hodgon *The Venture of Islam*, 1:59. Therefore, when I use the term 'Islamicate', I am not referring directly to the religious character of a society or a scholarly discipline. I consciously choose the use of the term 'Islamicate' because the term 'Arabic' reduce the character of a community to the language. In other words, the term 'Arabic' highlight the language as a qualifier for a community or research discipline.

Raḥmān b. Muḥammad al-Iṣfahānī (d. ?), he studied *ar-Risāla ash-Shamsiyya fī l-manṭiq* (Treatise on Logic for Shams ad-Dīn) composed by the Persian logician and philosopher Najm ad-Dīn ʿUmar b. ʿAlī al-Qazwīnī (d. 675/1276), known as al-Kātibī. Here, it should be noted that the study of *ar-Risāla ash-Shamsiyya fī l-manṭiq* had coined al-Iṣfahānī's training in logic, especially in Aristotle's *Posterior Analytics* and its appropriation by Ibn Sīnā in his work *al-Burhān* (Demonstration). In *ar-Risāla ash-Shamsiyya fī l-manṭiq*, both *Posterior Analytics* and *al-Burhān* represent the main references out of which al-Kātibī developed his logical model.[31] Al-Iṣfahānī studied *Qurʾān*, *ḥadīth*, philosophy, grammar, rhetoric and *kalām* with Nuṣayr ad-Dīn al-Fārūqī (d. ?) and Jamāl ad-Dīn b. Abī ar-Rajāʾ (d. ?).[32] He studied astronomy *(ʿilm al-hayʾa)*, medicine and mathematic with the Persian polymath Quṭb ad-Dīn ash-Shīrāzī (d. 710/1311) who was a student of the Persian astronomer and philosopher Nāṣir ad-Dīn aṭ-Ṭūsī (d. 672/1274).[33] Both worked in the Marāgha observatory built in 1259 by the founder of the Īlkhānid dynasty, Hülegü (d. 1265), under the direction of aṭ-Ṭūsī in Tabriz.[34] Both Quṭb ad-Dīn ash-Shīrāzī and aṭ-Ṭūsī were not only famous scholarly figures in the study of astronomy and scientific epistemology, but also well connected to the Ilkhānid court.[35]

Al-Iṣfahānī started his scholarly activities in Tabriz when the place had become at the end of the thirteenth century not only a scientific centre of religious scholarship, but also of demonstrative sciences such as astronomy. One can safely guess that al-Iṣfahānī interacted with different social actors and prominent scholarly figures in Tabriz. At that time, Tabriz was known – among others – for its "Marāgha scientific tradition and observatory".[36] It also operated not only as a centre of commercial attraction but also as a "seat of innovation artistic and intellectual activity"[37] with strong network structures that strengthened cultural and scholarly exchange.[38] That is, in about 1305 Jamāl ad-Dīn Ibn al-Muṭahhar al-Ḥillī (d. 726-1325), a prominent Shiite theologian, came to Tabriz. Upon his arrival, he seems to have become a prominent figure with regard to the debate on natural theology, God's attributes, prophecy and the Imamate. Al-Ḥillī abridged Nāṣir ad-Dīn aṭ-Ṭūsī's work entitled *Miṣbāḥ al-mutahajjid*. To the latter work, he added the eleventh section in which he additionally discusses matters on God's attributes, His acting in the word, prophecy and the last day. One of the opponents of al-Ḥillī's Shiite discourse was ʿAbd Allāh al-Bayḍāwī. The latter was at the end of thirteenth-century Īlkhānid Tabriz one of the famous Sunni scholars who were engaged with the Sunnite-Shiite-debate on faith and Imamate. This is thematically reflected in the third part of al-Bayḍāwī's work *Ṭawāliʿ*.

From aṣ-Ṣafadī's survey of al-Iṣfahānī's works that the latter wrote in Tabriz, one could observe that al-Iṣfahānī devoted many of his commentary writings during his stay in

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[31] For al-Kātibī's logical model and its distinction from Aristotle's *Posterior Analytics* and from Ibn Sīnā's logical system concerning the *dhātī/waṣfī* distinction see, for instance, Street, "Arabic Logic," 261-262.

[32] Aṣ-Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfī bi-l-wafayāt*, 25:365.

[33] Al-Laknawī, *al-Fawāʾid al-bahiyya*, 197.

[34] Mozaffari, Zotti, "Ghāzān Khān's Astronomical Innovations at Marāgha Observatory", 396.

[35] Morrison, "Natural Theology and the Qur'an," 4.

[36] Ragep, "New Light on Shams," 232.

[37] Prazniak, "Tabriz on the Silk Roads," 169.

[38] On the socio-political status of Tabriz in thirteenth century see, for instance, Kolbas, *The Mongolls in Iran*.

Tabriz to the Sunnite-Shiite-debate on faith.[39] He wrote, for instance, a commentary entitled *Tanwīr al-maṭāliʿ* (Lighting the High Rays). The latter is a commentary on al-Qāḍī Sirāj ad-Dīn Maḥmūd b. Abī Bakr al-Urmawī's (d. 682/1283) work entitled *Maṭāliʿ al-anwār fī l-manṭiq* (High Rays of Dawn-Light in Logic).[40] This commentary is an adequate example for a patron-client relationship because al-Iṣfahānī composed it on behalf of a chief judge *(qāḍī l-quḍāt)* names ʿAbd al-Malik (d. ?). Upon time, al-Iṣfahānī weaved intense networks with religious and political authorities in Tabriz. For example, he wrote on behalf of the Mongol/Ilkhānid Wazīr ʿAlī Shāh (d. ?) a commentary on Nāṣir ad-Dīn aṭ-Ṭūṣī's encyclopaedic and philosophical work *Tajrīd al-iʿtiqād* (Purification of the Belief).[41] The title of this commentary is *Tasdīd al-ʿaqāʾid fī sharḥ tajrīd al-qawāʿid* (Fortification of Religious Faith Through Commenting the Purification of the Belief). In addition to these works he wrote about *uṣūl al-fiqh* in the *Shāfiʿī* tradition. He composed his own work on logic where he shows how logical reasoning functions theoretically. What one can reconstruct from the dates indicated in the colophons and from the eulogies is that al-Iṣfahānī should have written the manuscripts mentioned above under the reign of the seventh ruler of the Īlkhānid dynasty Ghāzān (r. 1295-1304) up till the mid-reign of the ninth ruler of the Ilkhanate Abū Saʿīd (r. 1316-1355). After the latter had ordered the execution of the statesman and historian Rashīd ad-Dīn (d. 718/1318) as well as his eldest son in 1318, and because Sunni scholars had become a minority under the reign of Abū Saʿīd, al-Iṣfahānī decided to leave Tabriz. He went to pilgrimage to Mecca in 724/1324, from which he did not return to Tabriz, but travelled first to Jerusalem, then to Mamlūk Syria and finally to Cairo.[42] From that point forward, al-Iṣfahānī's name became in scholarly circles in Mamlūk Damascus synonymous with loyalty, respect and deep knowledge.

Mamlūk chronicles and bibliographical dictionaries describe al-Iṣfahānī by different epithets that reflected his reputation according the authors themselves. Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī (d. 852/1449), for instance, called him *Abū ath-Thanāʾ*[43] (a man endowed with praiseworthy duties). Taqī d-Dīn al-Maqrīzī (d. 845/1441) characterized him by using the epithet *ḏū l-funūn*[44] (a master in different scholarly disciplines). The latter epithet is used in those biographical dictionaries in which their author focused in more detail on al-Iṣfahānī's works. Ṣalāḥ ad-Dīn aṣ-Ṣafadī (d. 764/1362) named him *Abū l-Wafāʾ*[45] (a man of loyalty). Aṣ-Ṣafadī went a step further, and compared al-Iṣfahānī with Fakhr ad-Dīn ar-Rāzī not only as equal philosophical figures, but rather he presented the former as a better qualified logician than "al Quṭbayn", meaning Quṭb ad-Dīn ar-Rāzī (d. 766/1364) and Quṭb ad-Dīn ash-Shīrāzī (d. 710/1311).[46]

Upon his arrival in Damascus, al-Iṣfahānī started his teaching career and scholarly

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[39] Aṣ-Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfī bi-l-wafayāt*, 25:366.

[40] Ibid. For a detailed hand-list of commentaries on *Maṭāliʿ al-anwār* see Wisnovsky, "The Nature and Scope," 165.

[41] Aṣ-Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfī bi-l-wafayāt*, 25:366. For a detailed hand-list of commentaries on *Tajrīd al-iʿtiqād* see Wisnovsky, "The Nature and Scope," 182.

[42] Ibn Ḥajar, *ad-Durar al-kāmina*, 4:327; Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya wa-n-nihāya*, 16:181.

[43] Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, *ad-Durar al-kāmina*, 4:327.

[44] Al-Maqrīzī, *kitāb as-Sulūk*, Vol. 2.

[45] Aṣ-Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfī bi-l-wafayāt*, 25:325.

[46] Idem., *Aʿyān al-ʿaṣr*, 5:400.

activities. If one compares the works that al-Iṣfahānī had written in Tabriz with those he composed in Mamlūk Damascus, one can state that al-Iṣfahānī wrote in Damascus books related more to matters of *uṣūl al-fiqh*, and less to *uṣūl ad-dīn* or philosophical theology. In Damascus, he wrote, for instance, a commentary on the *Muqaddimat of Ibn al-Ḥājib* (d. 646/1249), and short interpretations of some Qurʾān verses such as verse 18 of *sūra 3 (āl ʿimrān)*, verse 56 of *sūra 33 (al-aḥzāb)*, and verse 5 of *sūra 22 (al-ḥajj)*.[47] One explanation for al-Iṣfahānī's interest in *ḥadīth* and *tafsīr* during his stay in Damascus could be that the latter weaved mutual relationships with scholars who were teaching *ḥadīth* and *Qurʾān*.[48] That is, he was educated in *fiqh* with the *Shāfiʿī* doctor and judge Jalāl ad-Dīn al-Qazwīnī (d. 739/1338). Afterwards, he studied *uṣūl al-fiqh* with the *Shāfiʿī* judge Kamāl ad-Dīn Ibn az-Zamalkānī (d. 727/1326) when the latter replaced Jalāl ad-Dīn al-Qazwīnī and took over the teaching position at the *Umm aṣ-Ṣāliḥ Madrasa* in Damascus in 700/1300.[49] In Damascus, al-Iṣfahānī had a mutual relationship with one of the prominent scholars at that time, namely with the *Ḥanbalī* scholar Taqī d-Dīn Aḥmad Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328).[50] Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī provides not only information on this close relationship, but also with regard to al-Iṣfahānī's reputation by Ibn Taymiyya.[51] Ibn Ḥajar states:

> He [al-Iṣfahānī] was a noble man. *Shaikh* Taqī ad-Dīn Ibn Taymiyya attended his lectures, and he exaggerated in praising him. One day, he said 'Silence please! A noble man is speaking, and we would like to hear what he is talking about. No one like him has ever come to this county'.[52]

This account of Ibn Ḥajar is valuable because it provides information with regard to the positive reputation of al-Iṣfahānī – who consistently refers in the *Maṭāliʿ* to Ibn Sīnā and Fakhr ad-Dīn ar-Rāzī's philosophical thought – by Ibn Taymiyya who was one of the harshest critics of Greek logic and philosophy in general[53] and of Ibn Sīnā and Fakhr ad-Dīn ar-Rāzī in particular.[54] It is also valuable because al-Iṣfahānī had a close interpersonal relationship with Ibn Taymiyya. In this regard Ibn Kathīr states that:

> When he came to Damascus, the judge Jalāl ad-Dīn al-Qazwīnī treated him generously. Thereafter, he frequently visited *Shaikh* Taqī d-Dīn Ibn Taymiyya (*ṣāra yataraddad ʿalā sh-Shaikh Taqī d-Dīn Ibn Taymiyya*). He learned with him, epically his reactions against the theologians. He spent time with him. Upon the death of Shaikh Taqī d-Dīn he moved

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[47] Ibid., 402.

[48] Idem, *al-Wāfī bi-l-wafayāt*, 25:325.

[49] Khalīfa, *Kashf aẓ-ẓunūn*, 1:241. For Ibn az-Zamalkānī's biography see Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, *ad-Durar al-kāmina*, 4:192–194.

[50] The list of publications on Ibn Taymiyya's life and thought is long. See, for instance, Laoust, *Essai*; Rapoport, Ahmed (eds.), *Ibn Taymiyya and his Times*; Krawietz, Tamer (eds.), *Islamic Theology*; Al Ghouz, "Kontingenzbewältigung als Zügel der Herrschaft," 47-61.

[51] Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, *ad-Durar al-kāmina*, 4:327.

[52] Ibid. my own translation. Cf. Calverley, Pollock (trans.), *Nature, Man and God*, xli.

[53] For the question whether Ibn Taymiyya rejected categorically the Greek logic see, for instance, Hallaq, *Ibn Taymiyya Against the Greek Logicians*; von Kügelgen, "The Poison of Philosophy," 255; Hoover, *Ibn Taymiyya's Theodicy of Perpetual Opimism*.

[54] Shihadeh, "From al-Ghazālī to al-Rāzī," 178

to Cairo and composed his *tafsīr*-work.[55]

The Muslim writer Ṣalāḥ ad-Dīn aṣ-Ṣafadī, for instance, states in his biographical work *Aʿyān al-ʿaṣr wa-aʿwān an-naṣr* that "al-Iṣfahānī educated many prominent scholars, and the famous of the latter witnessed him as the master of this [Muslim] community".[56] Aṣ-Ṣafadī himself states in his work *Aʿyān al-ʿaṣr* that he received an *ijāza* from his teacher al-Iṣfahānī in 729/1328.[57] In the biographical dictionaries, especially in the *ṭabaqāt ash-Shāfiʿiyya*, many prominent scholars are identified as being al-Iṣfahānī's students. For instance, the Muslim historian Ibn Kathīr (d. 747/1373) studied with al-Iṣfahānī *uṣūl ad-dīn* at the *Rawāḥiyya Madrasa* in Damascus where al-Iṣfahānī was appointed in *Shaʿbān* 2, 725/1325 as the follower of Ibn Kathīr's teacher the *Shāfiʿī* jurist Ibn az-Zamalkānī (d. 727/1326).[58] In this regard, Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī points out that "on the occasion of his hiring [as the follower of Ibn az-Zamalkānī] the nobles exaggerated in admiring him".[59] Aṣ-Ṣafadī describes this event by claiming that even Ibn Taymiyya had attended the opening lectures given by al-Iṣfahānī.[60] The physician and philosopher Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm Ṣalāḥ ad-Dīn (d. ?), known as Ibn ad-Dahhān, was educated in logic with al-Iṣfahānī and had studied medicine with Ibn an-Nafīs[61] (d. 687/1288).[62] Shihāb ad-Dīn Aḥmad b. Yaḥyā b. Faḍl Allāh al-ʿUmarī (d. 749/1349) who composed the encyclopaedic work entitled *Masālik al-abṣār fī mamālik al-amṣār* (Perception of Administrative Practices in Populous Places) was educated by al-Iṣfahānī in *Uṣūl ad-dīn*.[63] The religious scholar Muḥammad b. Maḥmūd Akmal ad-Dīn al-Bābartī (d. 786/1384) who was known as polymath of *ḥadīth*, language and grammar was a student of al-Iṣfahānī with whom he studied *Uṣūl ad-dīn* in Cairo after the year 740/1340. That is, al-Bābartī should have studied with al-Iṣfahānī who died in 1348 in the years between 1340 and 1348. Since al-Bābartī moved to Cairo in the 1440ies, one can safely guess that he studied with al-Iṣfahānī at the *Khānqāh*[64] of the Mamlūk Emir Sayf ad-Dīn Qawṣūn an-Nāṣirī (d. 1341).[65] Furthermore, al-Iṣfahānī authorized many religious scholars to issue legal opinions as shown by aṣ-Ṣafadī *(wa adhina li-jamāʿa kathīra fī l-iftāʾ)*.[66] At the age of 58, al-Iṣfahānī received in 732/1332 an official letter of invitation from the *Khānqāh* office of Majd ad-Dīn al-Aqṣurāʾī or al-Aqṣurī (d. 740/1340) where an-Nāṣir Muḥammad invited al-Iṣfahānī to come to Cairo.[67] Al-Iṣfahānī accepted this invitation and moved to Cairo in 1332. Till 1336, he lived at the Nāṣiriyya

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[55] Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya wa-n-nihāya*, 16:181.

[56] Aṣ-Ṣafadī, *Aʿyān al-ʿaṣr*, 5:401.

[57] Ibid., 404.

[58] Ibn Ḥajar, *ad-Durar al-kāmina*, 4:327; aṣ-Ṣafadī, *Aʿyān al-ʿaṣr*, 5:401–402; Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya wa-n-nihāya*, 16:182.

[59] Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, *ad-Durar al-kāmina*, 4:327.

[60] Aṣ-Ṣafadī, *Aʿyān al-ʿaṣr*, 5:402.

[61] For Ibn an-Nafīs medical thought see, for instance, Fancy, *Science and Religion in Mamluk Egypt*.

[62] Aṣ-Ṣuyūṭī, *Ḥusn al-muḥāḍara*, 1:545.

[63] Aṣ-Ṣafadī, *Aʿyān al-ʿaṣr*, 4:95.

[64] For the history of the *Khānqāh* in Mamlūk Egypt see, for instance, Fernandes, *The Evolution of a Sufi Institution in Mamkuk Egypt*; Little, "The Nature of Khānqāhs," 91–105.

[65] Van Steenbergen, "The amir Qawsun," 449-466.

[66] Aṣ-Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfī bi-l-wafayāt*, 25:326.

[67] An-Nāṣir Muḥammad appointed Majd ad-Dīn al-Aqṣurāʾī by the beginning of Jumādā I 725/1325 as the Chief *Shaikh* of Shuyūkh at the Nāṣiriyya *Khānqāh* in Siryāqūs. See, for instance, Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya wa-n-nihāya*, 16:182.

Khānqāh that built one of an-Nāṣir Muḥammad's strategies of urbanization.[68] An-Nāṣir Muḥammad was interested in urbanizing the rural region around Cairo. In this regard Fernandes states:

> He [an-Nāṣir Muḥammad] provided funds and building material to his amirs to construct khanqahs in the Qarafa with the purpose of attracting of more Sufis from the Egyptian provinces as well as Syria. Many of the foundations were associated with a mausoleum for the waqif, and that type of combined construction done outside the urban center was often called turba. This term was used to refer to foundation like that of Bektimur al-Saqi (726/1326), Qawsun (736/1335-36), Khawanda Tughay (before 49/1348), Khawanda Tulbay (765/1363-64) and others.[69]

Following his urbanization strategies, an-Nāṣir Muḥammad provided his Emir Qawṣūn with financial support to build his own *Khānqāh* in the Qarafa. Upon its opening in 736/1336, al-Iṣfahānī was appointed as its Chief *Shaikh* (Shaikh of Shuyūkh).[70] It was known as *qubbat wa khānqāh amīr Qawṣūn*, or as the *turba* and the *Khānqāh* of Qawṣūn. In Cairo, al-Iṣfahānī's scholarly focus was in the first place on philosophical theology, logic and *tafsīr*. The main character of these works is that al-Iṣfahānī dedicated the most of them to an-Nāṣir Muḥammad. For the latter, he wrote, for instance, 1. a commentary on Ibn as-Sāʿātī's (d. 694/1294) work *Badīʿ an-niẓām al-jāmiʿ* and named it *Sharḥ al-badīʿ*, and 2. the commentary under study *Maṭāliʿ al-anẓār*.[71] ʿAbd Allāh al-Bayḍāwī seems to have been the author who attracted al-Iṣfahānī's attention the most, because he wrote another commentary on the latter work, namely *Minhāj al-wuṣūl ilā ʿilm al-uṣūl* (*Towards Founded Methods of the Principles of Religion*). Al-Iṣfahānī wrote his own *tafsīr* that he couldn't complete due to his illness.[72] He spent the last seventeen years of his life in Cairo where he died in 749/1348 as a result of the Black Death.[73]

Based on the development and intertextuality of al-Iṣfahānī's works, one can conclude that al-Iṣfahānī drew on in Cairo to his early scholarly activities that he began in Tabriz. The thematic link between his career in Tabriz and that in Cairo is his focus on logic and philosophical theology. From the perspective of the social history of Islamic education, I claim that this development of al-Iṣfahānī's career was due to the fact that the latter was in Cairo well-integrated into two significant educational and religious foundations: the Nāṣiriyya *Khānqāh* in Siryāqūs and the *Khānqāh* of Qawṣūn. The following shows how al-Iṣfahānī's integration into these two foundations made him a philosophical broker in fourteenth-century Cairo.

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[68] Fernandes, *The Evolution of a Sufi Institution in Mamkuk Egypt*, 32.
[69] Ibid.
[70] Al-Maqrīzī, *al-Mawāʿiẓ*, 2:425.
[71] Aṣ-Ṣafadī, *Aʿyān al-ʿaṣr*, 5:403-404.
[72] Ibid.
[73] Ibid., 401; idem., *al-Wāfī bi-l-wafayāt*, 25:329.

4. Brokerage of Philosophical Knowledge in Fourteenth-Century Cairo: Al-Iṣfahānī's *Maṭāliʿ* as a Case Study

During the last two decades, few researchers, among them Emil Homerin and Caterina Bori, attempted to draw the attention of historians of the Mamlūk time (1250-1517), and particularly of experts of intellectual history to some methodical problems, especially to the "missing link" between intellectual and political history. In her recent article, Caterina Bori describes this phenomenon in studying "religion" during the Mamlūk period as follows:

> (…) I would like to focus on a few problematic topics which have so far received little attention in contemporary scholarship. This is probably due to their complexity, their scare appeal to historians and the nature of the sources. I am referring to what I perceived to be a missing link between theological production and its potential social and political significance, between theologians and society at large, between ideas about God and their relevance to people's lives.[74]

In order to find "the missing link" between the intellectual setting of al-Iṣfahānī's commentary *Maṭāliʿ* and its relevance to the socio-political life in which al-Iṣfahānī composed *Maṭāliʿ*, the latter will be examined from two perspectives: 1. from the perspective of social history, and 2. from the perspective of intellectual history.

4.1. The Social History of *Maṭāliʿ*

The fact that an-Nāṣir Muḥammad invited al-Iṣfahānī to come to Cairo and the latter accepted this invitation reflects a typical social phenomenon where political and intellectual history overlaps. This phenomenon reflects a client-patron relationship that needs to be examined more closely. Here, I will seek to analyse the extent to which such client-patron relationship had contributed to the transmission of philosophical knowledge by focusing on *Maṭāliʿ* as a case study.

In Mamlūk chronicles and biographical dictionaries, there is no evidence available with regard to the exact time and place of completing *Maṭāliʿ*. The only evidence available is that al-Iṣfahānī should have composed his commentary *Maṭāliʿ* during his stay in Cairo. The latter was in Cairo in the years between 1332 (upon his arrival in Cairo) and before the death of an-Nāṣir Muḥammad in 1341. During this timeframe, al-Iṣfahānī lived – as mentioned earlier – first at the Nāṣiriyya *Khānqāh*, and thereafter at the *Khānqāh* of Qawṣūn. As a consequence, he must have completed his commentary *Maṭāliʿ* in either one of these educational and religious foundations.

Upon his arrival in Cairo, al-Iṣfahānī lodged at the Nāṣiriyya *Khānqāh* with hundreds of Sufis from 1332 till 1336. It is not surprising that a *Shāfiʿī* religious scholar lived and taught at the Nāṣiriyya *Khānqāh*. We know, for instance, from Taqī ad-Dīn al-Maqrīzī's (d. 845/1441) historiographical work *al-Mawāʿiẓ wa-l-iʿtibār bi-dhikr al-khiṭaṭ wa-l-āthār* (known as *al-Khiṭaṭ al-maqrīziyya)* that religious scholars from the four schools of law taught

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[74] Bori, "Theology, Politics, Society," 58.

and, sometimes, lived at *Khānqāhs* for a while.[75] Furthermore, *Khānqāhs* have become under the reign an-Nāṣir Muḥammad scholarly complex where *fiqh* and *uṣūl* began to be taught.[76]

This means, that al-Iṣfahānī was appointed at the Nāṣiriyya *Khānqāh* as one of the teachers of the Shāfiʿī *madhhab*. Unfortunately, the available sources of Mamlūk chronicles and biographical dictionaries do not provide information concerning al-Iṣfahānī's social relationships with Sufis or the administrative apparatus of the Nāṣiriyya *Khānqāh*. The only evidence available concerns the relationship between al-Iṣfahānī as teacher and an-Nāṣir Muḥammad as the founder and the *wāqif* (the "sponsor") of the Nāṣiriyya *Khānqāh*.

In his semi-philosophical lectures at the Nāṣiriyya *Khānqāh*, al-Iṣfahānī attracted the attention of Muslim scholars through his permanent references to ʿAbd Allāh al-Bayḍāwī as a Sunni scholar with strong legal and philosophical lines of reasoning, convincing arguments and clear Sunni positions in Tabriz before the Īlkhānid dynasty of Persia was officially proclaimed as a Shiite "society" in 710/1310 under Īlkhān Öljeitü (r. 1304-1316).[77] Based on that, one can state on the one hand that al-Iṣfahānī used al-Bayḍāwī's *Ṭawāliʿ* in his open lectures at the Nāṣiriyya *Khānqāh*, and on the other hand that the philosophical features of *Ṭawāliʿ* were for the audience at the Nāṣiriyya *Khānqāh* not easy to understand. The interest of the Cairene Muslim scholars in the Tabrizian text *Ṭawāliʿ* captured, in turn, the interest of an-Nāṣir Muḥammad. This was probably the reason why an-Nāṣir Muḥammad asked al-Iṣfahānī to make *Ṭawāliʿ* accessible for the scholarly circles in Mamlūk Cairo.[78] Al-Iṣfahānī highlights in the eulogy of *Maṭāliʿ* that:

> A man – whom I would not contradict, and with whom I only agree – commissioned me to compose for him this commentary [on *Ṭawāliʿ*]. My task is to explain it in a way that clarifies its intention; confirms its fundamentals; discloses its purposes; strengthens it benefits; particularizes its generals; completes its details, solves its problems, and unravels its mysteries. I completely accepted the request he set to me. Hence, I exposed its unclear expressions and explained its meaning and structures (*mabānīh*). I gave this [commentary] the name *Maṭāliʿ al-anẓār: Sharḥ Ṭawāliʿ al-anwār.* (...) I have dedicated it to the one who is free of bad properties and has noble characters; a man, who is generous; believes in good deeds, and rightly guided by the merciful lord.[79]

At the Nāṣiriyya *Khānqāh*, al-Iṣfahānī seems to have made a name for himself. This was probably one of the reasons why Sayf ad-Dīn Qawṣūn an-Nāṣirī appointed al-Iṣfahānī as the

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[75] For a detailed description of the organization and administration of *Khānqāh* in Mamlūk Egypt see, for instance, Fernandes, *The Evolution of a Sufi Institution in Mamkuk Egypt*; al-Maqrīzī, *al-Mawāʿiẓ*, vol. 2.

[76] Fernandes characterizes the pedagogical change of teaching curricula within *Khānqāh's* from the reign of an-Nāṣir Muḥammad onwards as "a new turn in the urban center". Idem., *The Evolution of a Sufi institution in Mamkuk Egypt*, 32.

[77] See, for instance, Homerin, "The Study of Islam"; Ragep, "New Light on Shams" 231-250; Kolbas, *The Mongolls in Iran*, 191-374.

[78] Since an-Nāṣir Muḥammad was a politician without any connection to scholarly discourses concerning natural philosophy, the social background concerning the reasons why an-Nāṣir Muḥammad commissioned al-Iṣfahānī to write a commentary on *Ṭawāliʿ* needs to be examined from the perspective of intellectual history. See subsection 4.2 of this paper.

[79] Al-Iṣfahānī, *Maṭāliʿ al-anẓār*, 3. There is a slightly difference between my own translation and Calverley's and Pollock's translation. The difference consists in the equivalence of some notions and terms. Cf. Calverley and Pollock (trans.): Nature, Man and God in Medieval Islam, 7.

supreme *Shaikh* of his *Khānqāh*. Another explanation could be that both al-Iṣfahānī and Qawṣūn spoke – in addition to Arabic – another common language.[80] In his work *Aʿyān al-ʿaṣr*, aṣ-Ṣafadī states, that the relationship between Qawṣūn and al-Iṣfahānī was very close because both spoke *al-ʿajamiyya (rāja bi-l-ʿajamiyya ʿinda l-amīr Sayf ad-Dīn Qawṣūn)*.[81] However, from aṣ-Ṣafadī's account one can conclude that he doesn't mean by *al-ʿajamiyya* Qipchaq Turkish, because aṣ-Ṣafadī highlights that al-Iṣfahānī doesn't speak Qipchaq Turkish *(wa-kān ash-shaikh mā yaʿrif al-lugha at-turkiyya)*.[82] I claim that aṣ-Ṣafadī meant by *al-ʿajamiyya* the Persian language because al-Iṣfahānī spoke only Arabic and Persian. Another explanation for appointing al-Iṣfahānī as the supreme *Shaikh* at the *Khānqāh* of Qawṣūn, could be that al-Iṣfahānī was – as shown earlier – known among his colleagues and patrons as a loyal man. In Mamlūk studies, it is generally agreed that the success of a *Khānqāh* reflected the power and the reputation of a ruler within his community. This is the reason why many Mamlūk rulers – and even in the Ayyubid period in Egypt – were very eager to integrate re-nowned scholars from different regions of the Islamicate world into their *Khānqāhs*.[83] This may also have been the case of al-Iṣfahānī. The latter received a house in the new *Khānqāh* where he lived for almost 12 years.[84] Aṣ-Ṣafadī's account of the *Khānqāh* of Qawṣūn provides a detailed socio-economic background of al-Iṣfahānī as *Shaikh ash-Shuyūkh* of the latter *Khānqāh*. Aṣ-Ṣafadī states that al-Iṣfahānī "received a remarkable salary paid in dirhams, bread, meat, soap, oil and everything he needed".[85] In addition to these socio-economic privi-leges, al-Iṣfahānī enjoyed a special social and scholarly status that he never could achieve elsewhere. He had at the same time close relationships with the powerful Mamlūk ruler an-Nāṣir Muḥammad on the one hand and with his amir Sayf ad-Dīn Qawṣūn an-Nāṣirī on the other. In Mamlūk political leadership, he was associated with loyalty. The characteristic of loyalty was a decisive criterion for appointing Supreme *Shaikhs* at *Khānqāhs*. Mamlūk rulers appreciated the loyalty of the *Shaikh ash-Shuyūkh* because the latter propagated in lectures obedience *vis-à-vis* the Sultans and prevent the risk of social uprisings. This was, for instance, the case of the Mamlūk sultan aẓ-Ẓāhir Barqūq (r. 1382-1399) and the *Shaikh ash-Shuyūkh* Aslam al-Iṣfahānī (d. 802/1399) at the Nāṣiriyya *Khānqāh*. In this regard, al-Maqrīzī reports that Barqūq was looking for a safe place to secure himself against a conspiracy planed against him in 1399. Aslam al-Iṣfahānī refused to accommodate Barqūq, and the latter had to arrange another place as soon as possible.[86]

Following this introduction into the social prehistory of the *Maṭāliʿ* I will dwell upon the latter from the perspective of intellectual history.

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[80] On the "Lexicographic Turn" in the study of scholarly production in Mamlūk and Ottoman periods see al-Musawi, "The Medieval Islamic Literary World-System," 43–71.
[81] Aṣ-Ṣafadī, *Aʿyān al-ʿaṣr*, 5:402.
[82] Ibid.
[83] Fernandes, *The Evolution of a Sufi Institution in Mamkuk Egypt*, 102.
[84] Aṣ-Ṣafadī states that an-Nāṣir Muḥammad attended now and then al-Iṣfahānī's lectures. See idem., *Aʿyān al-ʿaṣr*, 5:402.
[85] Al-Maqrīzī, *al-Mawāʿiẓ*, 2:325.
[86] For the whole story, see, for instance, Fernandes, *The Evolution of a Sufi Institution in Mamkuk Egypt*, 102–103.

4.2. The Intellectual History of *Maṭāliʿ*

The commentary under study is about the creation of the world and the question of what makes a physical thing or a human being be what they are, and act how they act. The answer to these questions needs to be theoretically justified. Therefore, *falasafa-kalām* works from the emergence of the *Muʿtazilite* and the *Ashʿarite* traditions onwards attempt to develop epistemological, ontological and psychological principles out of which the study of the creation of the world can be conducted. In this regard, the Aristotelian theory of demonstrative syllogism *(burhān)* served many Muslim philosophers and theologians as theoretical tools for developing definitions and conducting scientific analyses. In his works *al-Mulakhkhaṣ fī l-ḥikma* and *al-Mabāḥith al-mashriqiyya*, Fakhr ad-Dīn ar-Rāzī is concerned in the first place with the theory of knowledge as developed by Aristotle in his *Posterior Analytics* 1.4, and appropriated[87] by Ibn Sīnā in his work *al-Burhān*.[88] In the latter work, Ibn Sīnā highlights two categories of knowledge: 1. conception *(taṣawwur)* and 2. judgment *(taṣdīq)*; the acquisition of both can be achieved through the methods of real definitions and demonstrative syllogism.[89] According to Aristotle, real definitions can be acquired in distinguishing between two essential conditions: 1. successive differentiation and 2. the differentiae should refer to two different timeframes.[90] Ar-Rāzī is not completely rejecting the Aristotelian theory of demonstrative knowledge, but he is criticizing primarily two aspects. First, he did not acknowledge that conceptions could be required. That is, he believed that conceptions are not acquired, but they are necessary by nature. Second, he rejects the idea that a real definition reveals the entire nature of a being or of a thing. Ar-Rāzī points out that we do not have a complete knowledge about the nature of things because, "definitions are simply explanations of linguistic items rather than a means to real conception."[91] He even rejects the Aristotelian philosophy of universals that the latter divides into simples and composites.[92] Ar-Rāzī developed his own logical program with appropriate epistemological and psychological principles, which he applied, for instance, to the study of the sensible phenomena. In al-Iṣfahānī's commentary *Maṭāliʿ*, this debate about the significance of demonstrative knowledge for the study of the physical and mental world is conducted in the introduction of his commentary.

Ibn Sīnā was one of the main important Islamic figures that significantly influenced the use of demonstrative syllogism in explaining the creation of the world. He examined thor-

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[87] I suggest that we look at the act of commenting a text as an act of appropriation of knowledge rather than as a mere reception of the former. Unlike the notion of reception that might mean the passive act of receiving something, the concept of knowledge appropriation involves obligatory the act of appropriation through interpretation and adaptation of previous ideas to a present socio-political and intellectual context that conditioned the characters and outcome of the act of appropriation. Commentators have their own economic and political interests. As a consequence, they may use a text being commented upon in order to activate a desired process of socio-political transformations through the transmission of some ideas. In turn, there is no appropriation of a certain philosophical ideas without interpretation of their textual sources. Concerning the concept of "Knowledge appropriation" see Krawietz and Tamer (eds.): *Islamic Theology, Philosophy and Law*, 20–30.
[88] Ibn Sīnā, *Kitāb al-Burhān*.
[89] Ibrahim, "Fakhr ad-Dīn ar-Rāzī," 392.
[90] Idem, *Freeing Philosophy*, 18–45.
[91] Idem., "Fakhr ad-Dīn ar-Rāzī," 399.
[92] Ibid.

oughly this question in his masterpieces *ash-Shifā*'[93] (The Healing) and *al-Ishārāt wa-t-tanbīhāt*[94] (Remarks and Admonitions). The quintessence of these two works is that Ibn Sīnā distinguished two categories of existences: 1. the potential existence *(mumkināt)*, and 2. the necessary existence *(wājib al-wujūd)*. To these two categories of existence, he added the non-existence *(mumtaniʿ al-wujūd)*. Both the existence and the non-existence of the fist category are possible. The non-existence of the second category is impossible because the latter is the first cause argument of the former (God). The existence of the non-existence is impossible. This tripartite distinction characterized the post-avicennian study of 1. the physical world, 2. God's acting in the world and His attributes, and 3. the bi-conditional relationship between the mental and physical world.[95] With regard to the first aspect, the debate is about whether a physical object is real in itself. In other words, it is about the question of whether a physical thing that is made of molecules and atoms can really be examined through rational considerations. Ibn Sīnā is one of the prominent figures of this philosophical determinism. Some opponents of this philosophy, like Fakhr ad-Dīn ar-Rāzī, claim that a physical object does not really exist. What exist in the physical world is those sense data that appear to us. One can't really know something about the physical object. In other words, the latter philosophy held that to be is not to exist in the physical world but rather to be perceived. The question is how one can know that there is a physical object out there. The discussion of this question is conducted in the first part of *Maṭāliʿ*, which is entitled "Potential Beings" *(mumkināt)*. In this section al-Iṣfahānī discusses Ibn Sīnā's determinism and ar-Rāzī's phenomenalism as two competitive philosophical systems by focusing on the following aspects: categories of existence from the perspective of the *Muʿtazilite* and the *Ashʿarite* tradition, as well as from the perspective of the philosophers, quiddity, intermediary causes, substance, especially temporal and eternal substantial beings, accident especially quantity, physic, and quality. In the second part of his commentary *Maṭāliʿ*, al-Iṣfahānī focuses more on God's acting in the world *(afʿāl)* and his Attributes *(ṣifāt)*. In other words, he is concerned with the question of whether God's duties and act of creating the universe are bound to the necessity of his nature, or whether they are autonomous. According to the first view, which is called the Avicennian necessitarianism, God has created the world in this way and in this form because he was – due to the necessity of his nature – never being able to create something else entirely. This necessitarian view contrasts the *Ashʿarite* view on God's act and nature.[96] The proponents of the latter view, which is known to researchers of Islamic philosophy as *Ashʿarite* occasionalism, believe that

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[93] Ibn Sīnā, *ash-Shifāʾ. al-ilāhiyyāt*.

[94] Idem., *al-Ishārāt*.

[95] See, for example, Eichner, "al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā," 71–95; Langermann (ed.), *Avicenna and His Legacy*; Koutzarova, *Das Transzendentale bei Ibn Sina* (Avicenna); Bertolacci, *The Reception of Aristotle's Metaphysics*, 213–302; McGinnis, "Scientific Methodologies in Medieval Islam," 307–327.

[96] Till the publication of Griffel's work entitled *Al-Ghazālī's Philosophical Theology* in 2009, two diametrically opposed readings of al-Ġazālī's cosmology ruled over the study of the latter's critique of al-Fārābī's and Ibn Sīnā's Aristotelian-Neoplatonist cosmology. Michael Marmura is one of the researchers who associate with al-Ġazālī's cosmology the impact of an *Ashʿarite* occasionalism. See here Marmura, "The Metaphysics," 172–187. Richard Frank is one the representative scholars who presented al-Ġazālī's cosmology as a tendency towards the Avicennian necessitarianism. Cf. Frank, *Al-Ġazālī and Ashʿarite School*. In contrast to M. Marmura and T. Frank, Griffel highlights that "al-Ghazālī reproduces a distinctly Avicennan position of causality and adds some of the more detailed accounts of the secondary causes *(asbāb thawānī)* from al-Fārābī's works." Cf. Griffel, *Al-Ghazali's Philosophical Theology*, 146.

God created the world in its form known to us autonomously and without any connection to the necessity of his nature. That means, that God was, according to this tradition, "of course" able to create the world completely differently if He wanted to, because his act of creation is free of the necessity of his nature. Fakhr ad-Dīn ar-Rāzī, a harsh critic of Ibn Sīnā's necessitarian cosmology, developed a competitive system with regard to causes and principles of the creation of the world. The third part of the text under study is devoted to debate on the prophecy and the need of mankind for the prophet in order to understand both the physical and the mental world. It is also about the last day *(ḥashr)*, especially about the question of how mankind's soul can continue to exist outside the physical human body even after the later have been completely destroyed. Throughout his commentary *Maṭāliʿ*, al-Iṣfahānī presents Ibn Sīnā and ar-Rāzī again as two prominent figures that have advanced two different competitive philosophical approaches. He juxtaposes Ibn Sīnā and ar-Rāzī by examining and interpreting the following sources:

- Ibn Sīnā's work: *kitāb al-Ishārāt wa-t-tanbīhāt* (Remarks and Admonitions), and *ash-Shifāʾ* (The Healing); and
- ar-Rāzī's work: *al-Mulakhkhaṣ fī l-ḥikma* (The Compendium of Philosophy and Logic), *al-Muḥaṣṣal* (Compedium), and *Sharḥ al-ishārāt wa-t-tanbīhāt* (Commentary on Ibn Sīnā's Work Remarks and Admonitions).[97]

In his commentary on *Ṭawāliʿ*, al-Iṣfahānī makes recourse to al-Bayḍāwī's lacking cross-references – especially Aristotle, Ibn Sīnā and ar-Rāzī – in order to clarify to whom the mentioned theory of demonstrative knowledge or of a philosophical view belongs to. But that is not all. He goes a step further, and discusses with Ibn Sīnā and ar-Rāzī what they are talking about. Besides, he addresses the question of how Ibn Sīnā received Aristotle's *Posterior Analytics*, and how ar-Rāzī criticized the former as well as Ibn Sīnā's work *kitāb al-Burhān*. He consequently discusses what al-Bayḍāwī thinks of these competitive theories of knowledge. Al-Iṣfahānī's act of commenting on the *Ṭawāliʿ* shows that he was familiar with the Avicennian and Rāzīan philosophical thoughts as two competitive philosophical programs. The linguistic patterns he uses in his act of commenting are to a certain extent didactic-oriented. However, this does not mean that *Maṭāliʿ* was conceptualized only for teaching purposes. It was a part of controversial debates on reason *(ʿaql)* and revelation *(naql)* among Muslim scholars in Mamlūk Egypt and Bilād ash-Shām. One of the Muslim scholars who coined the debate mentioned above in the late thirteenth and at the beginning of the fourteenth century in Egypt and Bilād ash-Shām was the *Ḥanbalī* scholar Taqī ad-Dīn Aḥmad Ibn Taymiyya who had – as mentioned earlier – a close relationship with Maḥmūd al-Iṣfahānī during his stay in Damascus. Ibn Taymiyya's views on the relationship between reason and revelation are crucial for understanding the scholarly background of al-Iṣfahānī's commentary *Maṭāliʿ* for two reasons:

1. Ibn Taymiyya criticised the theory of demonstrative knowledge as adopted by Ibn

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[97] For a detailed survey of commentaries on Ibn Sīnā's work *al-ishārāt wa-t-tanbīhāt* see Wisnovsky, "The Nature and Scope," 173–174.

Sīnā and ar-Rāzī in his work *ar-Radd ʿalā l-manṭiqiyyīn* (The Refutation of the Logicians). This work is thematically linked to all part of *Maṭāliʿ*. Second, *Shaikh al-islām* composed another *magnum opus* entitled *Darʾ taʿāruḍ al-ʿaql wa-n-naql*[98] (Averting the Contradiction Between Reason and Revelation) in which he criticises Ibn Sīnā, and even ar-Rāzī for giving priority to reason over revelation in the case of their contradiction.

2. These two works, that were composed only few years before al-Iṣfahānī wrote *Maṭāliʿ*, were one of the harshest critiques of logic and philosophy in thirteenth and fourteenth century Egypt and Bilād ash-Shām.
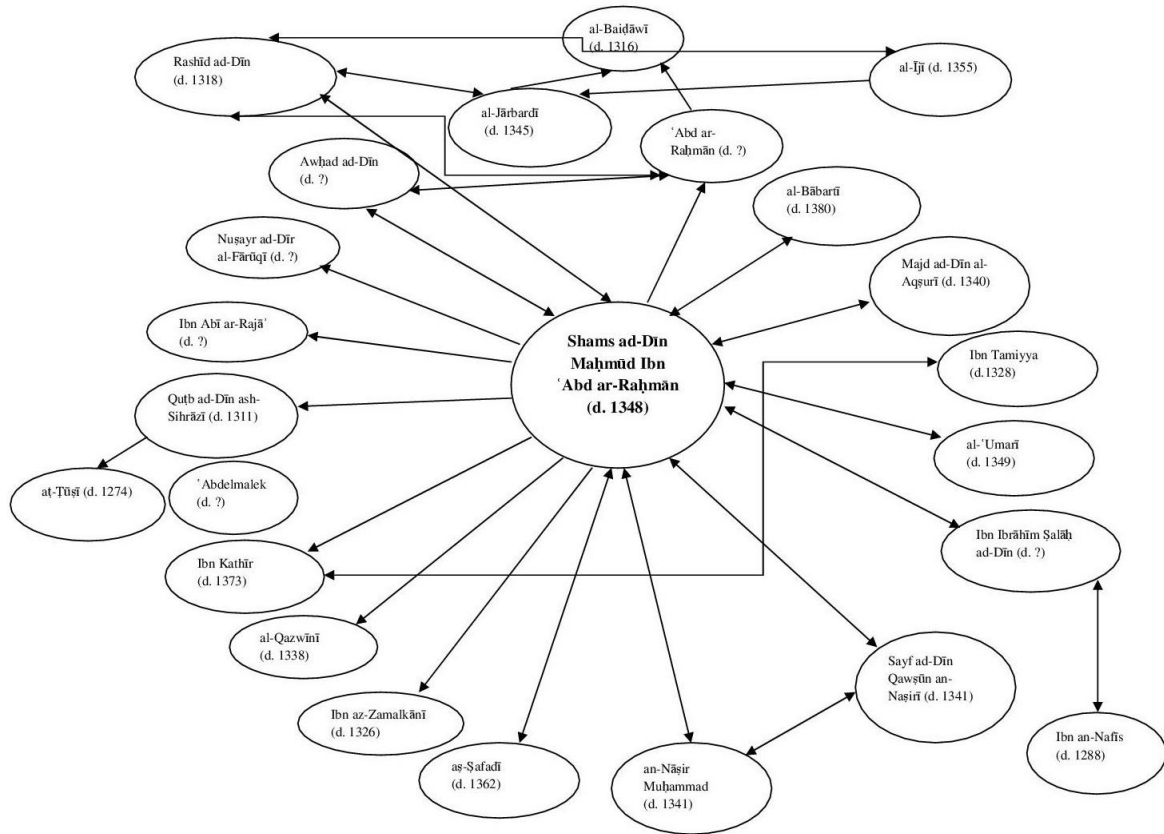
Seen from the perspective of intertextuality, *Maṭāliʿ* needs to be examined as a text in which al-Iṣfahānī positions himself between Aristotle's work *Posterior Analytics,* Ibn Sīnā's works *ash-Shifāʾ*, *al-Ishārāt wa-t-tanbīhāt* and *al-Burhān*, ar-Rāzī's works *al-Mulakhkhaṣ fī l-ḥikma*, *al-Mabāḥith al-mashriqiyya* and *Sharḥ al-ishārāt wa-t-tanbīhāt,* al-Ījī's work *Kitāb al-mawāqif fī ʿilm al-kalām*, and Ibn Taymiyya's masterpieces *ar-Radd ʿalā al-manṭiqiyyīn* and *Darʾ taʿāruḍ al-ʿaql wa-n-naql*.

5. Conclusion

To sum up, the examination of Mamlūk chronicles and bio-bibliographical dictionaries shows that many prominent scholars and political leaders were seen as being teachers, students or patrons of al-Iṣfahānī. If one looks at al-Iṣfahānī's network from an inside perspective one can see that al-Iṣfahānī's "egocentric network" was based on both symmetrical and asymmetrical relationships. Furthermore, one can identify in al-Iṣfahānī's egocentric network unilateral and mutual relationships, professional relationships and kingship-based relationships. From an outside perspective, al-Iṣfahānī seems to be a scholar of solid networks in different regions, and with different levels of hierarchies that depend on the nature of his status *vis-à-vis* the other end of the established relationship. This is due to his trans-regional networking with political authorities in Ikhanid Tabriz, in Bilād ash-Shām and Mamlūk Egypt as well as to his scholarly activities, the scholarly and the social status of his family, especially that of his father.

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[98] The new edition of this work consists of eleven volumes. Ibn Taymiyya, *Darʾ taʿāruḍ an-naql*.

Rashīd ad-Dīn (d. 1318)

al-Baiḍāwī (d. 1316)

al-Ījī (d. 1355)

al-Jārbardī (d. 1345)

ʿAbd ar-Raḥmān (d. ?)

Awḥad ad-Dīn (d. ?)

al-Bābartī (d. 1380)

Nuṣayr ad-Dīr al-Fārūqī (d. ?)

Majd ad-Dīn al-Aqṣurī (d. 1340)

Ibn Abī ar-Rajāʾ (d. ?)

Shams ad-Dīn Maḥmūd Ibn ʿAbd ar-Raḥmān (d. 1348)

Ibn Tamiyya (d.1328)

Quṭb ad-Dīn ash-Sihrāzī (d. 1311)

al-ʿUmarī (d. 1349)

aṭ-Ṭūṣī (d. 1274)

ʿAbdelmalek (d. ?)

Ibn Ibrāhīm Ṣalāḥ ad-Dīn (d. ?)

Ibn Kathīr (d. 1373)

al-Qazwīnī (d. 1338)

Sayf ad-Dīn Qawṣtūn an-Naṣirī (d. 1341)

Ibn az-Zamalkānī (d. 1326)

Ibn an-Nafīs (d. 1288)

aṣ-Ṣafadī (d. 1362)

an-Nāṣir Muḥammad (d. 1341)

Diagram 1: al-Iṣfahānī's interpersonal relationships

The act of commenting in the *Maṭāliʿ* was devoted in the first place to provide Cairene readers with training in both philosophical and linguistic features of natural philosophy as it has been established in the after Rāzīan period in the Iranian tradition. One explanation for the interest of the Mamlūk scholarly circles in *Ṭawāliʿ* might be that the later is rich in the features, which, for its intended readers, are held to be a solution for the most controversial debate on reason and revelation. Another explanation might be that the Mamlūk audience considered the *Ṭawāliʿ* as a window through which it can be seen what *Ṭawāliʿ* has meant to its audience in Tabriz and how the controversial debate mentioned above was discussed in Tabriz during the Īlkhānid period (1256-1353). Accepting these suggestions, one may argue that *Maṭāliʿ* helped its recipients to read *Ṭawāliʿ* philosophically in order to resolve politically the controversial debate on reason and revelation. This also explains the contrast between the *Ṭawāliʿ* and the *Maṭāliʿ* concerning references of books and epistemological methods.

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