



DMES PUBLIC TALKS

Literature as Magic, Magic as Literature:

Sirāj al-Dīn al-Sakkākī's Complete Book and a Fragment of Spells

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Handbooks like that ascribed to the famous 13th-century scholar of language and magic, Sirāj al-Dīn al-Sakkākī's *Kitāb al-Shāmil wa-baḥr al-kāmil*, do not themselves invite literary readings. This grimoire often displays all the literary charms of an ungrammatical cookbook; it is a technical manual—a mixed collection of magical recipes and rituals. It includes instructions for creating talismans, for contacting both jinn and devils, for causing hatred and sickness, for curing such magically caused afflictions, and for calling upon the power of each of the planets. As for previous research on Sakkaki, such studies tend to center on his influential book on language and rhetoric, *Miftāḥ al-'ulūm* (The Key to the Sciences), often ignoring his reputation as a magician. Nevertheless, early biographical literature credited him with the power to, for example, strike cranes down in mid flight with a magical inscription. I will argue that both Sakkaki's linguistic and magical interests show his fascination with the power of language. The power of language to alter the mind or create effects in the physical world is described as a kind of bewitchment in occult literature as well as in studies of language, not to mention in love poetry, and my own strategy in approaching magical texts is to read them with the techniques applied to poetry. I will also discuss some evidence of the practise of magic today, focusing on a mysterious 6-folio fragment of spells in Yale's Beinecke library.

Thursday 29 November 2018, 5.15pm

Room 8/9

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