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## Al-Suyūṭī and His Works: Their Place in Islamic Scholarship from Mamluk Times to the Present

Editor's note: The article that follows was written by Dr. Saleh at my request. It is my intention that from time to time we will publish a biographical article summing up what is known about an important person who lived during the rule of the Mamluks. The article should provide more detail than, for example, the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* and should include an extensive bibliographical apparatus. In short, it should provide a starting point for anyone wanting to know about a particular person who flourished under the Mamluks. Dr. Saleh compiled a list of famous Mamluk intellectuals, those usually referred to in the scholarly literature as "polymaths" because they contributed to so many different fields. From this list she selected al-Suyūṭī, both because of his inherent interest and because his life has been well documented in the primary and secondary literature. Dr. Saleh has agreed to produce a second biography for a future issue. If you are interested in participating in this project, please let us know.

Recognized as the most prolific author in the Islamic world, past and present, Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī is represented in virtually every genre of scholarly and literary production that existed during the Mamluk age. He believed himself to be the most learned man of his time, and this as well as even bolder claims that he made polarized his contemporaries into ardent supporters versus vehement adversaries. The controversy over the value of his contribution to scholarship continues to this day.

Al-Suyūṭī's life has been described in great detail elsewhere,<sup>1</sup> and here it is necessary to give only a brief outline. 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Abī Bakr ibn Muḥammad

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<sup>1</sup>Al-Suyūṭī's own autobiography, *Al-Taḥadduth bi-Ni'mat Allāh*, has been edited with extensive and valuable commentary by Elizabeth Sartain (*Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī*, University of Cambridge Oriental Publications, no. 23 [Cambridge, 1975]). Two of al-Suyūṭī's pupils wrote full-length biographies of their teacher: 'Abd al-Qādir al-Shādhilī, *Bahjat al-'Ābidīn bi-Tarjamat Ḥāfiẓ al-'Aṣr Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī*, ed. 'Abd al-Ilāh Nabḥān (Damascus, 1998) and Shams al-Dīn al-Dāwūdī, "Tarjamat al-Suyūṭī," of which an unedited manuscript is held in Tübingen (Sartain, *Al-Suyūṭī*, 1:148). Full-length modern biographies include Ṭāhir Sulaymān Ḥammūdāh, *Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī: 'Aṣruhu wa-Ḥayātuhu wa-Āthāruhu wa-Juhūduhu fī al-Dars al-Lughawī* (Beirut, 1989), Sa'dī Abū Jīb, *Hayāt Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī ma'a al-'Ilm min al-Mahd ilá al-Laḥd* (Damascus, 1993), Muḥammad al-'Arūsī al-Maṭwī, *Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī* (Beirut, 1995), and Iyād Khālid al-Ṭabbā', *Imām al-Ḥāfiẓ Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī, Ma'lamat al-'Ulūm al-Islāmīyah* (Beirut, 1996), in addition to numerous books and articles devoted to specific aspects of al-Suyūṭī's work.



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DOI: [10.6082/M1668B9Z](https://doi.org/10.6082/M1668B9Z). (<https://doi.org/10.6082/M1668B9Z>)

DOI of Vol. V: [10.6082/M1SX6B9Q](https://doi.org/10.6082/M1SX6B9Q). See <https://doi.org/10.6082/TSAJ-NM08> to download the full volume or individual articles. This work is made available under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International license (CC-BY). See <http://mamluk.uchicago.edu/msr.html> for more information about copyright and open access.

ibn Abī Bakr ibn ‘Uthmān ibn Muḥammad ibn Khiḍr ibn Ayyūb ibn Muḥammad ibn al-Humām Jalāl al-Dīn al-Khuḍāyri al-Suyūṭī was born on 1 Rajab 849/3 October 1445. His mother, a Circassian slave, was said to have given birth to him in the family library, where his father had sent her to retrieve a book; hence his prophetic nickname “*ibn al-kutub*” (son of books).<sup>2</sup> Al-Suyūṭī’s father, a scholar, died while al-Suyūṭī was a small child, but guardians made sure that the boy received the education usual for one of his background, beginning with memorizing the Quran and proceeding to the various religious sciences, grammar, *adab*, and Shafi’i jurisprudence. He was given his first *ijāzah* to teach grammar and *adab* at the age of sixteen, and by the following year had been given permission to teach Shafi’i jurisprudence and issue *fatwās* by the chief qadī, ‘Alam al-Dīn Ṣāliḥ al-Bulqīnī.

At the age of eighteen al-Suyūṭī inherited his father’s former post as professor of Shafi’i jurisprudence at the mosque of Shaykhū, and later added the post of teacher of hadith at the Shaykhūnīyah. He also was appointed to two other positions which seem to have been administrative rather than instructional: shaykh of sufis at the mausoleum of Barqūq al-Nāṣirī, and supervisor of the Baybarsīyah *khanqāh*.

Even as al-Suyūṭī’s scholarly fame began to spread abroad, his career in Egypt became mired in numerous disputes. Disagreements with other ulama on specific points of theology and law invariably degenerated into reciprocal personal attacks. There were also a number of widespread controversies (which involved the entire community of the ulama and in some cases the amirs and up to the sultan himself) into which al-Suyūṭī waded, including the question of the orthodoxy of the famous sufis Ibn al-Fāriḍ and Ibn al-‘Arabī (al-Suyūṭī defended it) and the question as to whether or not women would see God in the afterlife (al-Suyūṭī denied that possibility). His contentiousness and irascibility progressed to the point that he refused to pay the customary monthly courtesy call on the sultan Qāyṭbāy in order to receive personally his stipend as shaykh of the Baybarsīyah *khanqāh*, citing the practice of the early pious Muslims in refusing to frequent worldly rulers.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup>Abd al-Qādir ibn Shaykh al-‘Aydārūsī, *Al-Nūr al-Sāfir ‘an Akhbār al-Qarn al-‘Āshir*, ed. Muḥammad Rashīd al-Ṣaffār (Baghdad, 1934), 51.

<sup>3</sup>This incident provides a good example of al-Suyūṭī’s wont to vindicate his actions by writing one or more books. The result in this case was *Mā Rawāhu al-Asāṭīn fī ‘Adam al-Majī’ ilā al-Salāṭīn* (What the masters related regarding not frequenting sultans), ed. Majdī Fathī al-Sayyid (Tanta, 1991), as well as several books justifying his habit of wearing the *ṭaylasān*, a sort of shawl, to the few meetings he did have with Qāyṭbāy, a habit which had drawn negative comment from one of his arch-enemies, Ibn al-Karakī, a favorite of the sultan’s: *Ṭayy al-Lisān ‘an Dhamm al-Ṭaylasān* (Holding the tongue from censure of the *ṭaylasān*) in *Majmū’ Tisa’ Rasā’il* (Lahore, 1890) and “Al-Mufākharah bayna al-Ṭaylasān wa-al-Ṭarḥah” (Contest between the *ṭaylasān* and



In the late 890s/1480s, al-Suyūṭī began to withdraw from public life. He progressively resigned from his various teaching and administrative posts and stopped delivering *fatwās*. In 906/1501 he was dismissed from his post at the Baybarsīyah *khānqāh* following acrimonious disputes with the sufis there,<sup>4</sup> and when the sultan Ṭūmānbāy, in support of the sufis, sought to have him killed he went into hiding. Upon the sultan's death al-Suyūṭī reappeared but retreated completely to his house on Rawḍah Island, announcing that he was devoting himself to God, refusing to leave the house and receiving visitors only reluctantly. There he remained, writing and revising his works, until his death on 19 Jumādā I 911/18 October 1505.

What was al-Suyūṭī's stature as a scholar? There can be no doubt that he was endowed with an incredibly agile and retentive mind. He claimed to have memorized 200,000 hadiths, which were all that had come to his attention; if he had located more, he would have memorized them as well.<sup>5</sup> In speed of writing and composition al-Suyūṭī was "one of the great signs (*āyāt*) of God,"<sup>6</sup> and he was able to edit and dictate several works simultaneously; his pupil al-Dāwūdī is reported to have said: "I have seen the shaykh write three quires in one day, both composing and writing down, as well as dictate hadith and answer opponents."<sup>7</sup>

Quite early in his scholarly career al-Suyūṭī claimed special expertise in a number of subjects: "I was endowed with deep penetration in seven sciences: Quran commentary, hadith, jurisprudence, grammar, rhetoric (*ma'ānī*), rhetoric (*bayān*)<sup>8</sup>, and style (*badī'*)<sup>9</sup> (in the style of Arabs, not in the style of Persians and

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the *ṭarḥah* [a sort of veil]), Chester Beatty MS 3420. On Ibn al-Karakī's relationship with Qāyṭbāy see Helena Hallenberg, "The Sultan Who Loved Sufis: How Qāyṭbāy Established a Shrine Complex in Dasūq," *Mamlūk Studies Review* 4 (2000): 147-66. An additional factor in al-Suyūṭī's reluctance to meet with the sultan, according to his sufi biographer 'Abd al-Wahhāb al-Sha'rānī (d. 973/1565), was the fear that the Prophet, who had appeared to al-Suyūṭī more than seventy times while he was awake, would hide himself from him if he did so (*Al-Ṭabaqāt al-Ṣuḡhrā*, ed. 'Abd al-Qādir Aḥmad 'Aṭā [Cairo, 1970], 29-30).

<sup>4</sup>These reached the point that the sufis "rose up against their shaykh . . . and almost killed him, then they carried him in his clothes and threw him into the fountain." Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad Ibn Iyās, *Badā'ī' al-Zuhūr fī Waqā'ī' al-Duhūr*, ed. Paul Kahle and Muṣṭafā Muḥammad (Istanbul, 1931), 3:378.

<sup>5</sup>'Abd al-Ḥayy ibn Aḥmad Ibn al-'Imād, *Shadharāt al-Dhahab fī Akhbār Man Dhahab* (Beirut, 1966), 8:53.

<sup>6</sup>Najm al-Dīn ibn Muḥammad al-Ghazzī, *Al-Kawākib al-Sā'irah bi-A'yān al-Mī'ah al-'Āshirah*, ed. Jibrā'īl Sulaymān Jabbūr (Beirut, 1945), 1:228.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>"Al-*ma'ānī* wa'l-*bayān*: two of the three categories into which, since the time of al-Sakkākī (d.626/1229), the study of rhetoric has often been divided, the other being *badī'*. '*Ilm al-bayān* can best be translated with 'science of figurative speech,' as it only deals with the simile (as an



philosophers); and I believe that what I attained in these seven sciences (with the exception of jurisprudence) was never attained by any of my teachers, let alone others. I do not make this claim for jurisprudence, for there my teacher<sup>10</sup> has a wider perspective.”<sup>11</sup> He also claimed mastery, though to a lesser degree, of *uṣūl al-fiqh*, polemics, morphology, division of inheritances, elegant prose writing, letter-writing, Quranic recitation, medicine, and accounting.<sup>12</sup> He consciously avoided the “sciences of the ancients,” particularly logic.

Al-Suyūṭī came to feel that he had been born into an age of widespread ignorance and scholarly decline, and that as the most knowledgeable person of his time he had a special mission to assemble and transmit the Islamic cultural patrimony before it disappeared entirely due to the carelessness of his contemporaries.<sup>13</sup> This consciousness of his own superiority led him to make several very controversial claims.

Al-Suyūṭī’s conviction that “he alone, in an age of increasing ignorance, was a true scholar”<sup>14</sup> first led him to claim that “. . . the tools of *ijtihād* have been perfected in me—I say that praising God and not out of pride.”<sup>15</sup> Al-Suyūṭī noted that one could be a *mujtahid* in one field but not necessarily another, acknowledging that “most people are not aware of *ijtihād* in hadith and Arabic, but are aware of *ijtihād* in shari‘ah only.”<sup>16</sup> Al-Suyūṭī, however, claimed *ijtihād* in all three of these fields, a rank unequalled, in his view, by anyone since the time of al-Subkī (d. 756/1355).<sup>17</sup>

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introduction to the discussion of metaphor), the metaphor, the analogy, the metonymy and the allusion, and statement by implication. ‘*Ilm al-ma‘ānī* indicates a set of rather strict rules governing the art of correct sentence structure, the purpose of which was to demonstrate that changes in word order almost invariably lead to changes in meaning.” *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., *Glossary and Index of Technical Terms to Volumes I-VIII and to the Supplement, Fascicules 1-6*, 195-96.

<sup>9</sup>Badī‘: the branch of rhetorical science which deals with the beautification of literary style, the artifices of the ornamentation and embellishment of speech.” (Ibid., 33)

<sup>10</sup>Alam al-Dīn al-Bulqīnī.

<sup>11</sup>Muḥammad Sulaymān Faraj, “Thaqāfat al-Imām al-Suyūṭī wa-Intājuhu wa-Juhūduhu al-‘Ilmīyah fī al-Dirāsāt al-Islāmīyah” in *Al-Imām Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī: al-Iḥtifā’ bi-Dhikrā Murūr Khamsat Qurūn ‘alā Wafātih: Buḥūth al-Nadwah allatī ‘Aqadat’ hā al-Munaẓẓamah bi-al-Ta‘āwun ma‘a Jāmi‘at al-Azhar, al-Qāhirah, 11-13 Shawwāl 1413 H/3-5 Abrīl 1993 M.* ([Rabat], 1416/1995), 1:70, quoting from al-Suyūṭī’s *Asbāb Wurūd al-Ḥadīth* without giving an exact citation.

<sup>12</sup>Al-Sha‘rānī, *Al-Ṭabaqāt al-Ṣuḡhrā*, 22.

<sup>13</sup>Éric Geoffroy, “Al-Suyūṭī,” *EI*<sup>2</sup>, 9:914.

<sup>14</sup>Sartain, *Al-Suyūṭī*, vol. 1, *Biography and Background*, 61.

<sup>15</sup>Faraj, “Thaqāfat al-Imām,” 70. This matter is discussed in detail by Sartain, *Al-Suyūṭī*, 1:61-69.

<sup>16</sup>Al-Sha‘rānī, *Al-Ṭabaqāt al-Ṣuḡhrā*, 23 f.

<sup>17</sup>Al-Suyūṭī, *Al-Taḥadduth*, vol. 2 of Sartain, *Al-Suyūṭī*, 205-14.



The rejection of this claim by most of his contemporaries led al-Suyūṭī to explain himself in the face of what he felt was their misunderstanding. Their accusation that he had claimed unrestricted, independent *ijtihād* like that wielded by the four imams who had founded the major schools of law was false. Rather, he was entitled to “derivative” (*muntasab*) unrestricted *ijtihād* within his *madhhab*: “When I attained the rank of unrestricted *ijtihād*, I did not depart in giving legal opinions from the *madhhab* of al-Shāfi‘ī.”<sup>18</sup>

Al-Suyūṭī set out his claim to *ijtihād* at length in his *Al-Radd ‘alá Man Akhlada ilá al-Arḍ wa-Jahila anna al-Ijtihād fī Kull ‘Aṣr Farḍ* [Refutation of those who abide on the earth and are ignorant of the fact that *ijtihād* is a duty in every age].<sup>19</sup> As the title implies, al-Suyūṭī believed that anyone who denied the possibility of *ijtihād* was ignorant; it is a collective duty (*farḍ kifāyah*) which he, as the only qualified person, was discharging on his contemporaries’ behalf. He admitted, however, that while most of his opposition came from those who mistakenly denied the possibility of the current existence of any *mujtahid*, another group admitted that possibility but considered al-Suyūṭī unworthy of it.<sup>20</sup>

Al-Suyūṭī’s conviction of his intellectual superiority, indeed uniqueness, grew until he was impelled to make a yet bolder claim: to be the restorer of religion (*mujaddid*) expected at the end of every century:

. . . I hope . . . to be the *mujaddid* at the end of this ninth (fifteenth) century, just as al-Ghazālī had hoped for himself, because I alone have mastered all kinds of different disciplines, such as Qur’ānic exegesis and its principles, Prophetic tradition and its sciences, jurisprudence and its principles, language and its principles, syntax and morphology and their principles, polemics, rhetoric and good style, and history. In addition to all this, there are my outstanding, excellent works, the like of which nobody has written before, and their number up till now is about 500. I have originated the science of the principles of language (*uṣūl al-lughah*) and its study, and nobody has preceded me in this. It follows the same lines as Prophetic tradition and principles of jurisprudence. My works and my knowledge have travelled to all countries, and have reached Syria, Rūm, Persia, the Hijaz, the Yemen, India, Ethiopia, North Africa, and Takrūr, and have spread from Takrūr to the ocean. In all that I

<sup>18</sup> Al-Sha‘rānī, *Al-Ṭabaqāt al-Ṣuḡhrá*, 17-21.

<sup>19</sup> Ed. Fu‘ād ‘Abd al-Mun‘im Aḥmad (Alexandria, 1985).

<sup>20</sup> Al-Suyūṭī, “Irshād al-Muhtadīn ilá Nuṣrat al-Mujtahidīn” [Guidance for the rightly guided to support of the *mujtahids*], quoted in Sartain, *Al-Suyūṭī*, 1:68.



have mentioned, I have no equal, nobody else living has mastered the number of disciplines that I have, and, as far as I know, nobody else has reached the rank of unrestricted *ijtihād* except for me.<sup>21</sup>

Undaunted by his contemporaries' reaction to this claim, which will be discussed below, al-Suyūṭī went on to convince the shadow 'Abbasid caliph, al-Mutawakkil 'alā Allāh 'Abd al-'Azīz, to appoint him qadi-in-chief over all qadis in all the lands of Islam, with the power to appoint and dismiss whomever he liked. When the qadis predictably rose in outraged protest, the caliph backed down and rescinded the appointment, saying, "What part did I have in this? It was the shaykh Jalāl al-Dīn who persuaded me that it was desirable; he said that this was an ancient post, and the caliphs used to grant it to whomever they chose among the ulama."<sup>22</sup> Uncharacteristically, al-Suyūṭī unfortunately does not seem to have left an account of this affair from his point of view;<sup>23</sup> one can only speculate that it represented another aspect of his attempt to secure recognition as the foremost scholar of his time.

It appears that this recognition was more readily granted by those who were separated from al-Suyūṭī by either distance or time. He was widely revered outside of Egypt, and a great proportion of his writing consists of the *fatwās* he issued in response to requests from abroad. After his death a superstitious awe began to accrue to the scholar, at least according to his student Ibn Iyās, who reported that upon his death, some people bought his shirt and cap, hoping to obtain blessing through them.<sup>24</sup> There were even claims of miracles circulated, which purportedly al-Suyūṭī had requested be kept secret until after his death. These included the report of a servant that he and his master had miraculously been transported in an instant to Mecca and then just as quickly returned to Cairo,<sup>25</sup> and prediction of the Ottoman invasion and subsequent ruination of Egypt in 923/1517.<sup>26</sup>

Among al-Suyūṭī's contemporary peers, however, his own pupils seem to have been somewhat isolated in their great admiration and respect for the man. His arrogance and combative personality made it virtually impossible for other scholars to appreciate his undeniable accomplishments, and his more extravagant claims in particular were met with outrage and scorn. His professional life consisted

<sup>21</sup> Al-Suyūṭī, "Al-Tanbi'ah bi-Man Yab'athuhu Allāh 'alā Ra's Kull Mi'ah" [Announcement of he who is sent by God at the beginning of each century], quoted in Sartain, *Al-Suyūṭī*, 1:70-71.

<sup>22</sup> Ibn Iyās, *Badā' i' al-Zuhūr*, 3:331.

<sup>23</sup> Sartain, *Al-Suyūṭī*, 1:93.

<sup>24</sup> Ibn Iyās, *Badā' i' al-Zuhūr*, 4:83.

<sup>25</sup> Al-Sha'rānī, *Al-Ṭabaqāt al-Ṣuḡhrá*, 30.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.



largely of disputes with other scholars (another large body of his writing consists of refutations of others' opinions, numerous titles beginning with *Al-Radd 'alá . . .*).

Perhaps the most powerful individual with whom al-Suyūṭī was in conflict was Ibn al-Karakī, a favorite of the sultan Qāyṭbāy—a conflict that caused him serious difficulties.<sup>27</sup> His bitterest rival, however, appears to have been al-Sakhāwī.

Al-Sakhāwī's entry on al-Suyūṭī in his biographical dictionary, *Al-Daw' al-Lāmi' li-Ahl al-Qarn al-Tāsi'*, drips with vitriol. He accused al-Suyūṭī firstly of plagiarism: ". . . he would take . . . a lot of earlier works in various fields which were not well known to his contemporaries, change a little bit, and then present them attributed to himself, and make a great fuss in presenting them such that the ignorant would suppose them to be something unequalled."<sup>28</sup> He added sarcastically, "If he were going to steal them, I wish at least he had not distorted them—if he had just copied them it would have been more useful."<sup>29</sup>

Al-Sakhāwī went on to denigrate al-Suyūṭī's mastery of grammar (of which, we may recall, al-Suyūṭī was particularly proud) by accusing him of phonetic corruption (*tahrīf*) and misspelling or misplacement of diacritics (*tashīf*). This he attributed to al-Suyūṭī's faulty education which resulted from his having acquired much of his learning by reading independently rather than receiving it orally from a teacher.<sup>30</sup>

Al-Sakhāwī was particularly scornful of al-Suyūṭī's claim to *ijtihād*; and not al-Sakhāwī alone but, he claims, "Everybody rose against him when he claimed *ijtihād*."<sup>31</sup> In fact, al-Sakhāwī said, the claim was made "to cover up his mistakes."<sup>32</sup> In sum, al-Sakhāwī admitted grudgingly that al-Suyūṭī was "quick at writing," but his truly distinguishing feature was his "folly and excessive arrogance, even to his mother, so that she continually complained of him."<sup>33</sup>

As noted before, al-Suyūṭī seems to have been appreciated best at a distance. The sufi writer al-Sha'rānī (d. 973/1565), for instance, venerated al-Suyūṭī and wrote of him, "He was the most knowledgeable person of his time in the sciences and arts of hadith."<sup>34</sup> Complimentary entries on him appear in many later biographical

<sup>27</sup>See note 3.

<sup>28</sup>Muḥammad ibn 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sakhāwī, *Al-Daw' al-Lāmi' li-Ahl al-Qarn al-Tāsi'* (Beirut, 1966), 4:66.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., 68.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., 69.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., 68.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., 69.

<sup>34</sup>Al-Sha'rānī, *Al-Ṭabaqāt al-Ṣuḡhrá*, 28.



dictionaries and histories, from that of his pupil Ibn Iyās (d. ca. 930/1524)<sup>35</sup> through al-Ghazzī (d. 1061/1651)<sup>36</sup> and Ibn al-‘Imād (d. 1089/1679).<sup>37</sup> The centuries following al-Suyūṭī’s death are replete with abridgements, commentaries, and supercommentaries on his works (the pre-modern counterpart to our secondary literature).

With the rise of European interest in Islamic history and literature, al-Suyūṭī came in for his share of the disdain generally heaped on all authors post-dating the “golden” Abbasid period. Ignaz Goldziher (d. 1921), for instance dismissed a lifetime of work with the scathing comment: “. . . our ingenious al-Suyūṭī did not shrink from drawing up treatises which, at a cursory glance, purport to have no other end than the elucidation of the subject set down on the title page, but which, on closer examination, prove to be nothing other than polemical works whose sole purpose is to serve as an exaggerated advertisement for their author and as instruction to his contemporaries in his unsurpassed and unsurpassable greatness and erudition.”<sup>38</sup>

Goldziher apparently shared al-Suyūṭī’s contemporaries’ outrage at his daring to claim the right of *ijtihād* as well as the status of the most learned man of the time:

Even if a not inconsiderable degree of vanity and self-esteem is required to list the description of his own life and scholarly labors among the biographies of the mujtahidūn—a vanity which is best illustrated by the pompous style and manner in which al-Suyūṭī speaks of his own works and refers to his own academic career—this is to a large extent overshadowed by the almost nauseating kind of self-adulation we find in his lesser works.

Despite his ability and diligence, and despite the value of his achievement, he must naturally have become an insufferable figure to many of his learned contemporaries, to whom the circumstance of his laying claim to all merit for himself seemed to detract from their own worth.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Ibn Iyās, *Badā’ i’ al-Zuhūr*.

<sup>36</sup> Al-Ghazzī, *Al-Kawākib al-Sā’ irah*.

<sup>37</sup> Ibn al-‘Imād, *Shadharāt al-Dhahab*.

<sup>38</sup> Ignaz Goldziher, “Zur Charakteristik Gelāl ud-dīn us-Sujūtī’s und seiner literarischen Thätigkeit,” *Sitzberichte der philosophisch-historischen Classe der Akademie der Wissenschaften, Wien* 69 (1871), translated with notes by John Hunwick, “Ignaz Goldziher on al-Suyūṭī: A Translation of his Article of 1871, with Additional Notes,” *The Muslim World* 68, no. 2 (April 1978): 80-81.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.



Many earlier modern Arab scholars, and some up till the present, share this assessment, though without Goldziher's venomous and curiously personal dislike. They tend to dismiss al-Suyūṭī as a mere compiler. Sa'dī Abū Jīb, for instance, while titling his article "Al-Suyūṭī: Allāmat 'Aṣriḥ" [al-Suyūṭī: the most erudite of his age], opined that al-Suyūṭī's writings are not innovative nor do they show creative thought; this is only to be expected as that was the style for scholarly writing in his day. His value lies in the fact that he preserved for us earlier writings that were otherwise destroyed by the Mongol invasions and the fall of Spain.<sup>40</sup>

Al-Suyūṭī's modern Western biographer, Elizabeth Sartain, cautiously agreed, at least partially, with this negative evaluation of scholarship in the Mamluk age and, by extension, that produced by al-Suyūṭī. While defending al-Suyūṭī against al-Sakhāwī's charges of plagiarism, Sartain deferred final judgment as to the "originality" of his work to "specialists in the fields of Muslim learning in which he wrote."<sup>41</sup> She did note that the age's emphasis on oral transmission and memorization helped to discourage original thought,<sup>42</sup> and concluded that despite the favorable conditions, and "in spite of the great activity of scholars, few outstanding contributions to knowledge were made, and by al-Suyūṭī's time there was evidence of steady decline in academic standards."<sup>43</sup>

In contrast, and perhaps in reaction to this, in recent times there has been what might be termed a revival of interest in al-Suyūṭī and his work. An only moderately intensive search for books and articles dealing exclusively or substantially with the subject of al-Suyūṭī yielded a total of 192 titles, the vast majority written within the last thirty years. Following the traditional path, many of these are commentaries (s. *sharḥ*) on specific works. Others discuss al-Suyūṭī's sources and methodology in his endeavors in such fields as Quran commentary, philology, jurisprudence, and history, while still others attempt to evaluate his contributions and his significance as a scholar to those fields.

Two international conferences devoted solely to al-Suyūṭī have been held in Egypt, one in 1976 and a second in 1993, the latter commemorating the five hundredth anniversary of al-Suyūṭī's death.<sup>44</sup> (That same year an entire issue of

<sup>40</sup>Sa'dī Abū Jīb, "Al-Suyūṭī: 'Allāmat 'Aṣriḥ," *Al-Turāth al-'Arabī* 13, no. 51 (1413/1993): 63-78.

<sup>41</sup>Sartain, *Al-Suyūṭī*, 1:115.

<sup>42</sup>*Ibid.*, 123.

<sup>43</sup>*Ibid.*, 119. Al-Suyūṭī, of course would have agreed with her assessment of scholarship in his age while excepting himself. See Sartain's lengthy discussion of this topic, which is much more nuanced than my extracts might suggest, pp. 112-33.

<sup>44</sup>The proceedings of both conferences have been published: *Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī*, prepared by al-Majlis al-A'lā li-Ri'āyat al-Funūn wa-al-Ādāb wa-al-'Ulūm al-Ijtimā'īyah, 13-19 (Cairo, 1978) and *Al-Imām Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī: al-Iḥtifā' bi-Dhikrā Murūr Khamsat Qurūn 'alā Wafātih:*



the journal *Al-Turāth al-‘Arabī*<sup>45</sup> was devoted to articles treating various aspects of his life and work.) While the first conference was attended only by Egyptian participants, the second widened its scope to include contributors from a wide range of Muslim countries: Egypt, Syria, Jordan, Palestine, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Azerbaijan, Morocco, Kuwait, Pakistan, Senegal, Malaysia, Qatar, Iraq, and Tunisia. Neither, however, included any Western participants, and the papers published in the proceedings of both conferences (which treated basically the same themes as other literature on al-Suyūṭī) showed virtually no awareness of, or perhaps interest in, Western contributions to Suyūṭī studies.

Spokesmen for both conferences expressly stated that their purpose was to “revive” the memory of al-Suyūṭī, which had been unfairly allowed to lapse. The second conference went on to lay out a number of ambitious goals in this regard. These included, among others, organizing competitions (with prizes) for students carrying out al-Suyūṭī studies; production of a film on al-Suyūṭī; translating some of his works into world languages; urging journalists and other disseminators of information in all Islamic countries to educate the people about al-Suyūṭī’s contributions to Islamic culture; and enlisting the cooperation of various Muslim institutions to revive al-Suyūṭī’s beloved *ijtihād*.<sup>46</sup>

Some Western scholars as well have become more appreciative of the value of al-Suyūṭī’s work. For instance, Éric Geoffroy’s 1997 *Encyclopaedia of Islam* article on al-Suyūṭī disputes the widespread condemnation of al-Suyūṭī as merely a compiler. No doubt he did do a great deal of compiling, extracting, summarizing, and commenting on earlier works (including his own) in keeping with his perceived mission of preserving the Islamic scholarly heritage. Yet he went beyond that, according to Geoffroy: “. . . he prefigures the modern period by certain aspects, such as being partly an autodidact, presenting to a public, which he wanted to be widened, manuals which were centered around precise themes. . . . He indeed takes up themes which were usually neglected in Islamic literature. . . . As for form, al-Suyūṭī’s procedure is scientific in so far as he quotes his sources with

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*Buḥūth al-Nadwah allatī ‘Aqadat’ hā al-Munazzamah bi-al-Ta‘āwun ma’a Jāmi‘at al-Azhar, al-Qāhirah, 11-13 Shawwāl 1413 H/3-5 Abrīl 1993 M./Commemorating the 5th Centennial of the Death of Imam Jalal-Eddine Al-Souyouti: Papers presented at the Symposium organized by ISESCO and Al-Azhar University, Cairo, 11-13 Shawal 1413 H/3-5 April 1993/Commémoration du 5e centenaire de la mort de L’Imam Jalal-Eddine Al-Souyouti: Communications présentées au colloque organisé par l’ISESCO et l’Université Al-Azhar Le Caire, 11-13 chaoual 1413 H/3-5 avril 1993 ([Rabat], 1416/1995).*

<sup>45</sup>Vol. 13 (1413/1993).

<sup>46</sup>*Al-Imām Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī*, 2:602-3. I cannot say whether any of these goals have actually been met.



precision and presents them in a critical way. In the introduction to a work, he often defines the method which he is going to follow. His works benefit from a clear structure, and he often broke new ground by expounding his material according to its alphabetical order.<sup>47</sup>

In any discussion of al-Suyūṭī, one is bound to express admiration, whether frank or grudging, and astonishment at the sheer massive quantity of his literary output. Al-Suyūṭī incorporated lists of his own works in other works on several occasions, and the biographies written by his students al-Shādhilī and al-Dāwūdī contained such lists approved by him. These lists differ from one another, ranging in size from 282 to 561 titles. Later biographical descriptions of al-Suyūṭī almost always include a count of his works if not a list; these range up to the nearly one thousand titles claimed (but not listed) by Ibn al-Qāḍī (d. 1025/1616).<sup>48</sup>

The first modern Western attempt to compose a list of al-Suyūṭī's works, drawing from various sources, was carried out by Gustav Flügel in 1832,<sup>49</sup> and named more than 500 titles. Carl Brockelmann (who was concerned only with extant manuscripts) listed 415.<sup>50</sup> Since then a number of works have been devoted to the question of al-Suyūṭī's production and to attempting to pin the list down.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>47</sup>Éric Geoffroy, "Al-Suyūṭī, Abū'l Faḍl 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Abī Bakr," *EI*<sup>2</sup>, 9:914-15.

<sup>48</sup>Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad Ibn al-Qāḍī, *Durrat al-Ḥijāl fī Asmā' al-Rijāl*, quoted in Yaḥyá Maḥmūd Sā'ātī, "Mushkilat al-'Unwān fī Mu'allafāt al-Suyūṭī wa Atharuhā fī Iḍṭirāb Iḥṣā' 'Adadihā bayna al-Dārisīn" in *Al-Imām Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī*, 1:141.

<sup>49</sup>Gustav Flügel, "Sojuti's Leben und Schriften," *Jahrbücher der Literatur, Anzeige-Blatt* 58; 59; 60 (1832): 25-40; 20-36; 9-29.

<sup>50</sup>Carl Brockelmann, *Geschichte der Arabischen Litteratur* (Leiden, 1949), 2:180-204, S2:179-98.

<sup>51</sup>'Abd al-Ḥayy ibn 'Abd al-Kabīr Kattānī, *Fihris al-Fahāris wa-al-Ithbāt wa-Mu'jam al-Ma'ājim wa-al-Mashyakhāt wa-al-Musalsalāt* (1928; reprint Beirut, 1982-86), 2:1010-22; Jāmi'at al-Riyāḍ, Qism al-Makhtūṭāt, *Fihris Makhtūṭāt al-Suyūṭī al-Mawjūdah bi-Jāmi'at al-Riyāḍ*, prepared by Yaḥyá Maḥmūd Sā'ātī (Riyadh, 1972); Aḥmad al-Sharqāwī Iqbāl, *Maktabat al-Jalāl al-Suyūṭī: Sijill Yajma'u wa-Yasifu Mu'allafāt Jalāl al-Dīn 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Suyūṭī* (Rabat, 1397/1977); 'Iṣām al-Dīn 'Abd al-Ra'ūf, "Mu'allafāt al-Suyūṭī" in *Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī*, 103-32; 'Abd al-'Azīz 'Izz al-Dīn Sayrawān, *Mu'jam Ṭabaqāt al-Ḥuffāz wa-al-Mufasssīrīn, ma'a Dirāsah 'an al-Imām al-Suyūṭī wa Mu'allafātih* (Beirut, 1984); 'Abd al-Ilāh Nabhān, "Fihris Mu'allafāt al-Suyūṭī al-Maṭbū'ah, Mansūqah 'alā al-Ḥurūf," *Ālam al-Kutub* 12, no. 1 (Rajab 1411/Jan 1991): 33-53; Muḥammad Khayr Ramaḍān Yūsuf, "Al-Mustadrak 'alā Fihris Mu'allafāt al-Suyūṭī al-Maṭbū'ah," *Ālam al-Kutub* 12, no. 3 (Muḥarram 1411/Aug 1991): 440-49; Yaḥyá Maḥmūd Sā'ātī, "Fihris Mu'allafāt al-Suyūṭī al-Mansūkh fī 'Āmm 903: Dirāsah wa-Taḥqīq," *Ālam al-Kutub* 12, no. 2 (Shawwāl 1411/Jan 1991): 232-48; idem, "Fihris Makhtūṭāt al-Suyūṭī: Nuskhah min Awākhir al-Qarn al-Thālith 'Ashar," *Ālam al-Kutub* 13, no. 6 (al-Jumādiyān 1413/Oct-Nov 1992): 639-47; idem, "Mushkilat al-'Unwān fī Mu'allafāt al-Suyūṭī"; Badī' al-Sayyid al-Lahhām, "Al-Mustadrak al-Thānī 'alā Fihris Mu'allafāt al-Suyūṭī al-Maṭbū'ah," *Ālam al-Kutub* 14, no. 3 (Dhū al-Qa'dah-Dhū al-Hijjah 1413/May-Jun 1993): 321-34; Ekmeleddin Ihsanoğlu, "Makhtūṭāt Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī fī Maktabāt Turkiyā" in *Al-Imām Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī*, 1:171-74; Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm al-



Each list contains, and omits, works respectively omitted and contained in other lists.

Elizabeth Sartain, in her work on al-Suyūṭī's autobiography, detailed the difficulties that preparing a definitive list of his works would entail:

At one stage of my research, I had hoped to be able to prepare a complete list of al-Suyūṭī's works. Regrettably, this turned out to be impossible. Al-Suyūṭī's works number altogether some 600; one could conceivably prepare an accurate and complete list even of so large a number of works, were it not for the obscurity and confusion concerning the exact titles and subjects of many of them. Some of these problems can be solved by reference to existing MSS, other obscurities cannot be clarified because the works concerned have been lost. This confusion has several causes: firstly, many of the works have more than one title, for instance, a book referred to in one context by its proper title, may be mentioned in another context merely as "Commentary on such-and-such a work" or "Treatise on such-and-such a subject". These titles then become recorded in lists of al-Suyūṭī's works as if they are separate works. I suspect that al-Suyūṭī himself occasionally made this mistake in his own lists of his works, and certainly Brockelmann's list has several examples of such confusion. Secondly, it was al-Suyūṭī's habit to rewrite his works, to abridge them, sometimes more than once, to issue parts of a larger work separately, and sometimes to join short works together in a larger one. This means that there may be two or more works on exactly the same subject, sometimes with very similar titles; once the titles are misrecorded by copyist or cataloguer, it becomes impossible to distinguish between them except by reading them, if copies have survived and are accessible. The task of drawing up a list of al-Suyūṭī's works would be easier if he had written less; as it is, anyone who embarks on this task will be obliged to consult many of those MSS of al-Suyūṭī's works which have survived, and these probably run into thousands, scattered in libraries all over the world.<sup>52</sup>

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Shaybānī and Aḥmad Sa'īd al-Khāzindār, *Dalīl Makḥṭūṭāt al-Suyūṭī wa-Amākin Wujūdhā* (2nd ed., Kuwait, 1995); Nāṣir ibn Sa'ūd ibn 'Abd Allāh Salāmah, *Mu'jam Mu'allafāt al-Suyūṭī al-Makḥṭūṭah bi-Maktabat al-Mamlakah al-'Arabīyah al-Sa'ūdīyah al-'Ammah* (Riyadh, 1996).

<sup>52</sup>Sartain, *Al-Suyūṭī*, 1:179.



Although valiant efforts have been made in this direction, notably by Aḥmad al-Sharqāwī Iqbāl and Muḥammad Ibrāhīm al-Shaybānī with Aḥmad Sa‘īd al-Khāzindār in their identifications of extant manuscripts,<sup>53</sup> it appears that for the matter to be solved (to the extent possible given the survival or lack thereof of any given work) it would require implementation of the primary recommendation set forth at the 1993 conference. This called on ISESCO (the Islamic Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization) to appoint a committee of experts to prepare a detailed, indexed list of al-Suyūṭī’s works, indicating manuscript locations of extant works, and date and place of publication of published titles.<sup>54</sup>

How was it possible for one man to produce such a huge quantity of work? ‘Iṣām al-Dīn ‘Abd al-Ra’ūf admonished us not to dismiss this as impossible; after all, al-Suyūṭī began writing at the age of seventeen and spent the last years of his life in seclusion, totally devoted to his work of composing and editing.<sup>55</sup> Moreover, as Sartain and others have noted, al-Suyūṭī often divided single works into sections, giving each section a separate title. Al-Sakhāwī sniffed, “He [al-Suyūṭī] mentioned that his compositions exceed three hundred books. I saw of them what consisted of a single sheet of paper [e.g., a *fatwā*]; as for those that are less than one quire, they are many.”<sup>56</sup> To be fair to al-Suyūṭī, though, we must note that conversely a number of his works consist of many volumes. Clearly there is no getting around the fact that the man was extraordinarily productive.

The range of subjects which al-Suyūṭī covered is equally impressive. Lists of al-Suyūṭī’s works are typically divided by subject. His student al-Shādhilī’s list, approved by the master himself in the year 904/1498-99, for instance, is classified as follows: Quran commentary and what relates to it, 37 titles; hadith and what relates to it, 207 titles; what is related to the terminology (*muṣṭalah*) of hadith, 24 titles; jurisprudence, 73 titles; principles of jurisprudence, principles of religion, and sufism, 17 titles; philology, grammar, and morphology, 57 titles; rhetoric, 7 titles; works combining various subjects, 10 titles; literature, anecdotes, prose

<sup>53</sup>See note 51.

<sup>54</sup>*Al-Imām Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī*, 2:602.

<sup>55</sup>‘Abd al-Ra’ūf, “Mu’allafāt al-Suyūṭī,” 24.

<sup>56</sup>Al-Sakhāwī, *Al-Daw’ al-Lāmi’*, 4:68.



composition, and poetry, 97 titles;<sup>57</sup> and history, 32 titles.<sup>58</sup> This is virtually a syllabus of classical Islamic scholarship.

What, then can be said about the true value, the quality as opposed to quantity of this vast corpus? Al-Suyūṭī clearly considered his work qualitatively and not just quantitatively superior to that of any of his peers: "It is my wont to write only on matters in which I have no precursor and then to exhaust the subject completely."<sup>59</sup> Yet he never claimed to have authored four or five or six hundred weighty tomes. He was well aware of the different levels of significance of his various works (one might quibble with his decision to award a title to a one-page *fatwá* and list it as a "work"). A valuable glimpse into his thinking is provided by his list of his own works that appears in his autobiography *Al-Taḥadduth bi-Ni'mat Allāh*. This list, unlike all others including those drawn up by him, is divided not by subject matter, but into seven classes delineated by worth and degree of originality.

Al-Suyūṭī described the first class of his works as follows: "Those for which I claim uniqueness. The meaning of this is that nothing comparable has been composed in the world, as far as I know. This is not due to the incapability of those who came before—God forbid—but it simply did not happen that they undertook anything like it. As for the people of this age, they cannot produce its like due to what that would require of breadth of vision, abundance of information, effort, and diligence."<sup>60</sup>

This section consists of 18 titles:

Eight in the field of philology and grammar:

"Jam' al-Jawāmi' fī al-'Arabīyah"

Its commentary, entitled "Ham' al-Hawāmi'"

"Al-Ashbāh wa-al-Nazā'ir fī al-Qawā'id al-'Arabīyah," also entitled

"Al-Maṣā'id al-'Alīyah fī al-Qawā'id al-'Arabīyah"

"Al-Silsilah fī al-Naḥw"

"Al-Nukat 'alá 'Al-alfīyah' wa-'Al-Kāfiyah' wa-'Al-Shāfiyah'

<sup>57</sup>Most of these are *maqāmāt*; Brockelmann labelled them al-Suyūṭī's "experiment[s] in belles-lettres" and noted dryly that they ". . . only have the title and the form (rhymed prose) in common with the perfect examples of this genre. . . ." (Carl Brockelmann, "Al-Suyūṭī, Abū'l Faḍl 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Abī Bakr b. Muḥammad Djalāl al-Dīn al-Khūḍairī al-Shāfi'ī," *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 1st ed., (reprint), 7:573. While perhaps artistically lacking, the subject matter of these *maqāmāt*, which ranges from information on plants to erotica, once again highlights al-Suyūṭī's amazing versatility.

<sup>58</sup>Al-Shādhilī, *Bahjat al-'Ābidīn*, 175-255.

<sup>59</sup>Al-Suyūṭī, "Ghāyat al-Iḥsān fī Khalq al-Insān," quoted in Goldziher/Hunwick, "Ignaz Goldziher on al-Suyūṭī," 94.

<sup>60</sup>Al-Suyūṭī, *Al-Taḥadduth*, vol. 2 of Sartain, *Al-Suyūṭī*, 105.



wa-'Al-Shudhūr' wa-'Al-Nuzhah<sup>61</sup> in one composition  
 "Al-Fatḥ al-Qarīb 'alá 'Mughnī al-Labīb"<sup>62</sup>  
 "Sharḥ Shawāhid 'Al-Mughnī"  
 "Al-Iqtirāḥ fī Uṣūl al-Naḥw wa-Jadaluḥ"

Six in the field of Quran and its commentary:

"Al-Itqān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān"  
 "Al-Durr al-Manthūr fī al-Tafsīr bi-al-Ma'thūr"  
 "Tarjumān al-Qur'ān"  
 "Asrār al-Tanzīl"  
 "Al-Iklīl fī Istinbāṭ al-Tanzīl"  
 Tanāsuq al-Durar fī Tanāsub al-Āyāt wa-al-Suwar

One each in hadith, biography, jurisprudence, and a rebuttal of logic and scholastic theology:

"Nukat al-Badī'āt 'alá 'Al-Mawḍū'āt"<sup>63</sup>  
 "Ṭabaqāt al-Nuḥāh al-Kubrā," entitled "Bughyat al-Wu'āh"  
 "Al-Jāmi' fī al-Farā'id," incomplete  
 "Ṣawn al-Manṭiq wa-al-Kalām 'an Fann al-Manṭiq wa-al-Kalām"

Subsequent generations have agreed with al-Suyūṭī's esteem for these 18 works. All of them were valued enough to be represented by extant manuscripts; the value accorded to them in more recent times can be gauged by the fact that all but 3 of them have been published (some many times).

Al-Suyūṭī described his second class as one "for which comparable works have been composed, and a very learned person could produce its like. This class includes works of which at least a volume, more or less, was completed,<sup>64</sup> though some of them are labeled "unfinished." This class comprises 50 titles; many of these are abridgements of Suyūṭī's or others' works, abridgements of abridgements, and commentaries on commentaries. Of these, 38 titles are extant, and 30 of these titles have been published.

<sup>61</sup>"Al-Alfīyah fī al-Naḥw wa-al-Ṣarf" by Ibn Mālik (d. 672/1274); "Al-Kāfiyah fī 'Ilm al-I'rāb" and "Al-Shāfiyah fī 'Ilm al-Taṣrīf" by Ibn al-Ḥājib (d. 646/1249); "Shudhūr al-Dhahab fī Ma'rifat Kalām al-'Arab" by Ibn Hishām (d. 761/1360); "Nuzhat al-Ṭarf fī 'Ilm al-Ṣarf" by al-Maydānī (d. 518/1124). (Sartain, *Al-Suyūṭī*, 1:180, n. 12)

<sup>62</sup>"Mughnī al-Labīb 'an Kutub al-A'arīb" by Ibn Hishām (d. 761/1360). (Sartain, *Al-Suyūṭī*, 1:180, n. 13)

<sup>63</sup>"Al-Mawḍū'āt min al-Aḥādīth al-Marfū'āt" by Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 597/1200). (Sartain, *Al-Suyūṭī*, 1:180, n. 7)

<sup>64</sup>Al-Suyūṭī, *Al-Taḥadduth*, vol. 2 of Sartain, *Al-Suyūṭī*, 106.



Class three consists of 60 works of small size, ranging from 2 to 10 quires (s. *kurrāsah*).<sup>65</sup> Of these, 55 are extant, and only 17 of them remain unpublished.

Class four comprises quire-length works, excluding *fatwās*.<sup>66</sup> Al-Suyūṭī listed here 102 works, including 59 extant works of which 32 have been published. This section includes, among other things, his many *maqāmāt*, which are not here listed individually under their separate titles but have often been so listed and so published.

*Fatwās* are gathered into a class of their own. Al-Suyūṭī characterizes them as being of the size of “quires—more or less,”<sup>67</sup> though as we have seen they could be “less” than a quire to the extent of being a single page. There are 80 titles here; of these, a surprising 67 are extant and 60 have been published (though most often in compilations, not separately).

Al-Suyūṭī’s class six is quite interesting. These, he said, are “compositions that I do not count because they are of the type done by idlers who are interested merely in transmitting, which I composed at the time I was studying and seeking *ijāzahs*—although they contain good points compared to what other people write.”<sup>68</sup> Most of these 40 titles are “*muntaqās*” [selected extracts] of other works; indeed, they appear to be little more than al-Suyūṭī’s study notes. Not surprisingly, only 8 are extant, none of them published.

The final class consists of works “which I started then lost interest in, having written only a little.”<sup>69</sup> These 83 titles again seem mainly to consist of notes and study aids: abridgements, marginal notes on commentaries and supercommentaries, versifications, no doubt to aid in memorization. Of these 15 still exist and 6, all on the subject of hadith, have even been published.

This gives us a snapshot, based on one listing, of the place of al-Suyūṭī’s works in Islamic scholarship. We can attempt to judge the value placed on a given work by succeeding generations by seeing whether or not that work was copied and has left surviving manuscripts. As mentioned earlier, a number of attempts have been made to identify the existence and location of manuscripts of all of al-Suyūṭī’s works.<sup>70</sup>

<sup>65</sup>Ibid., 111.

<sup>66</sup>Ibid., 115.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid., 121.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid., 126.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid., 129.

<sup>70</sup>Brockelmann, *GAL*, 2:180-204, S2:179-98; Iqbāl, *Maktabat al-Jalāl al-Suyūṭī*; Sā‘ātī, “Fihris Makhtūṭāt al-Suyūṭī”; al-Shaybānī and al-Khāzindār, *Dalīl Makhtūṭāt al-Suyūṭī*. Al-Shaybānī and al-Khāzindār located manuscripts representing 724 works and were unable to locate manuscripts for 187 more titles, giving a total of 911 works.



In turn the judgment of more modern times on the worth of a certain work is evidenced by publication or lack thereof. I have come up with a list of 392 works written by al-Suyūṭī that have been published at least once, without counting additional editions of the same title.<sup>71</sup> Surely the production of such a huge number of works judged worthy of publication is a tremendous achievement.

It is an interesting though probably ultimately futile exercise to seek a definitive enumeration of the individual works within the corpus of al-Suyūṭī's literary production and to trace the existence and location of their manuscripts and history of publication. However, stepping back now to focus on the forest instead of the trees, al-Suyūṭī gave the world an enormous quantity of scholarly material, saving and transmitting treasures of the Islamic cultural heritage but also adding his own valuable contribution to it.

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<sup>71</sup>Other such listings, all of which I have taken into account, include again Iqbāl, *Maktabat al-Jalāl al-Suyūṭī* and al-Shaybānī and al-Khāzindār, *Dalīl Makhṭūṭāt al-Suyūṭī*, as well as Nabhān, "Fihris Mu'allafāt al-Suyūṭī al-Maṭbū'ah"; Salāmah, *Mu'jam Mu'allafāt al-Suyūṭī*; Yūsuf, "Al-Mustadrak 'alā Fihris Mu'allafāt al-Suyūṭī al-Maṭbū'ah"; and al-Lahhām, "Al-Mustadrak al-Thānī 'alā Fihris Mu'allafāt al-Suyūṭī al-Maṭbū'ah."



It is my intention that from time to time we will publish a biographical article summing up what is known about an important person who lived during the rule of the Mamluks. The article should provide more detail than, for example, the Encyclopaedia of Islam and should include an extensive bibliographical apparatus. Dr. Saleh compiled a list of famous Mamluk intellectuals, those usually referred to in the scholarly literature as "polymaths" because they contributed to so many different fields. From this list she selected al-Suyuti, both because of his inherent interest and because his life has been well documented in the primary and secondary literature. Al-Suyuti's life has been described in great detail elsewhere,<sup>1</sup> and here it is necessary to give only a brief outline.

4 In *Wishā' al-Suyuti*, al-Suyuti attempts to reconcile the earliest erotological tradition with the Islamic sciences, something he does more consistently than his predecessors. The result is an extensive investigation of the sexual pleasures permitted for Muslims—particularly men, but also, to a certain degree, women. Women's sexual behavior and obligations are treated by al-Suyuti in *Shaqiq al-utrunj* and *Nuzhat al-muta'ammil*, which rely partly on the same sources as *Wishā' al-Suyuti*.

5 Al-Suyuti draws on an imposing number of earlier sources from different fields of knowledge, especially the hadiths, but also lexicography, historical anecdotes (*akhbār*), medicine, and erotology. In *Wishā' al-Suyuti* and *Shaqiq al-utrunj*, al-Suyuti acts

1 There is an edition of *Al-Wishā' al-Suyuti* by al-ʿAsad at al-ʿAsan ʿAbd al-Qawā (Damascus, 2001). Al-Suyuti is famed for his extraordinarily large output, with estimates ranging from 500 to 900 works in total. The number of these works is partly so large, because it includes a number of shorter works, including fatwas (opinions concerning Muslim law) and short collections of ahadith such as the text translated below. This collection, *Al-Qawl al-jaliyy fi fadail Ali* (The Clear Statements on the Merits of Ali) is a collection of forty Prophetic ahadith, concerning Imam Ali and his esteem in the Sunni community.

2 Saleh, Marlis J. *Al-Suyuti and His Works: Their Place in Islamic Scholarship from Mamluk Times to the Present*. *Mamluk Studies Review* 5 (2001), pp. 7389. Sartain, E. M. *Jall al-Dn al-Suyuti: Biography and Background*. Within a short period of time, the Mamluks created the greatest Islamic empire of the later Middle Ages, which included control of the holy cities Mecca and Medina.

The Mamluk sultanate (1250–1517) emerged from the weakening of the Ayyubid realm in Egypt and Syria (1250–60). Ayyubid sultans depended on slave (Arabic: *mamluk*, literally "owned," or slave) soldiers for military organization, yet mamluks of Qipchaq Turkic origin eventually overthrew the last independent Ayyubid sultan in Egypt, Turan Shah (r. 1249–50), and established their own rule. Their unusual political system did not rely entirely on family succession to the throne—slaves were also recruited into the governing class. Hence the name of the sultanate later given by historians. All these works exhibiting genuine scholarship and research attest the exhaustive study and indefatigable efforts of the orientalist who have applied themselves to their tasks with enthusiasm and sincerity.

2. 1. The books in question are *Sili'ilh Sittoh*. *Musnod od-Diirmi*. Their endeavor is to create doubts about Islam and its law and culture in the minds of youngmen receiving education in the western universities so that the latter should return home completely disenchanted with Islam and its way of life, and with a sense of despondency in the present and future of the Islamic world. At the same time, the research scholars should avoid mannerism and euphuism in their compositions, nor should they take resort to satire and sarcasm. nor.