I.14
PHYSIOGNOMY

Science of intuition

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ʿIlm al-firāsa, physiognomy, which will be discussed in this chapter, was the science of reading physical features and appearances to discern character traits. Nowadays, it is generally understood to focus on the face; however, historically, it involved the entire body, stature, posture, movements, lines on hands, feet and the forehead, color and skin irregularities such as moles. In this chapter, I first look at the Greek and Indian backgrounds of the practice of physiognomy. In the following section, I argue that physiognomy is a science that systematizes and legitimizes the application of intuition (*ḥads*) making it an ally to medicine, especially since they share the focus on the body. The underlying premise of this survey is that occult practices were part and parcel of the scientific activities of medieval and early modern Islamicate societies. Adepts of such practices investigated phenomena that also concerned other sciences perceived by us retrospectively as "mainstream". For example, action at a distance was at the heart of astrological and magical theories, and the nature of intuition was the concept with which medicine, divination generally and physiognomy particularly grappled. The questions of action at a distance and intuition continue to be relevant to the fields of quantum mechanics, mathematics and medicine and constitute a major philosophical component still negotiated and contested in these sciences, as they were in medieval physiognomy, astrology and medicine.

To demonstrate intuition as a negotiated and contested concept, I also investigate a later trend that promoted physiognomy as an esoteric science, that is knowledge reserved to the spiritually elite, a skill gifted by God to those who seek and achieve proximity to the divine. The sphere of natural philosophy that contained the practice of physiognomy competed in its understanding with experiential and the mystical spheres of knowledge. Respectively, one centered on the discursive ability of deduction while the other sought to attribute extraordinary acts to revelation and inspiration in order to verify the privilege and stratification of those who achieve gnosis. This chapter demonstrates these epistemological maneuvers in the case of physiognomy by surveying texts, transmissions and classifications.

In the intellectual and scientific spheres of medieval Islamicate societies, physiognomy (*firāsa*) was linked to divination (*kihāna*), which was deemed as one of the "occult sciences" (*al-ʿulūm al-khafiyya*) or "subtle sciences" (*al-ʿulūm al-daqīqa*; Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ 2008[CB],[1] 4: 107). The Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ (The Brethren of Purity; [*fl.* 4th/10th century]),[2] in their short epistle on magic, enumerate five of these sciences: alchemy, astrology, magic/talismanry,

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medicine and one they call *the science of abstracts* (*ʿilm al-tajrīd*) "whereby the soul knows itself" (Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ 2008, 4: 287). Divination does not appear in this list, but in the long version of the same epistle, *kihāna* (divination) is included as one of the "magical" sciences concerned with "telling what will happen before its occurrence" (Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ 2008, 4: 312–13). This division of the occult sciences is common; however, physiognomy (*firāsa*) and its subset chiromancy or palmistry, and separately pedomancy, occupy an ambiguous place in these classifications (Figure I.14.1).[3] The Ikhwān do briefly discuss physiognomy as they include it among practices, such as auguries (*zajr*), auspices (*al-faʾl*) and divination (*kihāna*), that indicate those things which are not apparent or have not yet occurred. For the Ikhwān, physiognomy is "the method of extracting morals (*akhlāq*) by examining features (*khalq*)" (Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ 2008, 4: 298). In this sense, it is a kind of "inductive divination", using Toufic Fahd's (1923–2009) term (Fahd 2012). These practices are distinguished from any other divinatory disciplines that predict via material or natural means such as astrology, which produces predictions through the study of the locations of the stars and planetary configurations (Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ 2008, 4: 190). This is made clear elsewhere in the *Epistles* (*Rasāʾil*), where we encounter physiognomy as one of the skills and sciences associated with the planet Mercury, attained through the mind's "estimative" faculty (*al-quwwa al-wahmiyya*). In addition to physiognomy, these skills include imagination, thought, analysis, conceptualization, distinction, inspiration, feeling and sensation (Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ 2008, 4: 222). The inclusion of physiognomy among these mental skills implies that it is without material, physical or astral mediation. Instead, it is a science reliant on intuition.

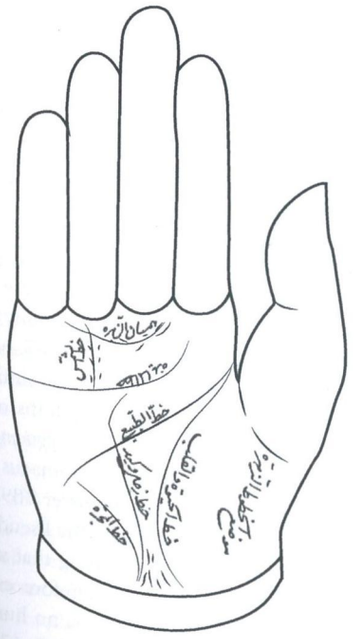

Figure I.14.1 Physiognomy of the palm of the hand (*firāsat al-kaff*) as described in *The Book of the Secrets of the Palm of the Hand* (*Kitāb Asrār al-Kaff*) by some ʿAbd al-Ḥasan, published in 1303/1886.
Source: @ photographer Liana Saif, Amsterdam

1.14.1 The Greek and Indian background of Islamic physiognomy

Physiognomy in Arabic sources represents Mesopotamian, Indian and Greek traditions of reading human marks (Akasoy 2008, 121–6). The Mesopotamian physiognomic omen collection known as *Šumma alamdimmû* (dated 11th century BCE) strikingly resembles in structure and content the Indian physiognomic omens, particularly the marks of men and women known as *puruṣalakṣaṇa* and *strīlakṣaṇa*. The Mesopotamian and Indian systems share a similar protasis and apodosis structure,[4] the male–female divisions and their inclusion of chiromancy and pedomancy. The first Indian system of bodily marks is found in one chapter of the *Astral Sciences According to Gārga* (*Gārgīyajyotiṣa*) from around the 1st century, although the precise date is contested (Mitchiner 1986, 82; Pingree 1981, 69–71; Pingree 1987, 95).

It is followed by two chapters in Varāhamihira's 6th-century *Great Collection of Verses* (*Bṛhatsaṃhitā*). In both works, physiognomy is embedded in the principal doctrines of the Brahmanical *jyotiḥśāstra*, meaning "the science of the stars". It contains two main sections on the marks of men and women, with the former's content applied to the upper three classes: Brahmans, *kṣatriya* (ruling/military class) and *vaiśya* (merchants, craftsmen and landowners), and the latter focused on adolescent girls. Both adopt the toe-to-head formula (Zysk 2014, I: 66–9). The *Great Collection of Verses* was known to the Khwarazmian scholar al-Bīrūnī (362–after 444/973–after 1052), and its root text was translated into Persian in the 8th/14th century (Zysk 2014, 1: 56).

Physiognomy in Arabic shares with the Indian system four major aspects. One of them is the inclusion of chiromancy and pedomancy as subsections. Chiromancy, for instance, is found in the *Astral Sciences According to Gārga* as part of the study of women's marks (Zysk 2014, 1: xi, 37–8, 55–6, 62–3). Thus, it is not surprising that Arabic texts that deal with chiromancy attribute this science to India (Ṭaşköprüzāde 1985[CB], 1: 327; al-Rāzī n. d., 145; al-Rāzī 1939, 11–12). In a widely cited statement, the Damascene geographer and Sufi Shams al-Dīn al-Anṣārī (727/1327) states in his *Epistle on the Science of Physiognomy* (*Risāla fī ʿilm al-firāsa*) that chiromancy "is [a part] of physiognomy, attributed to Ṭamṭam the Indian, Tankulūshā, and the scientists of India such as Sharāsīm the Indian" (MS Riyadh, University of Riyadh, 415, fol. 86b).

A second feature that Indian and Arabic teachings of physiognomy have in common is their treatment of race-based characteristics (Zysk 2014, 1: ix–x; Hoyland 2005, 381–3). These are not found in one of the two Greek physiognomic texts that were fundamental for the later Arabic literature by the politician and intellectual Polemon of Laodicea (*c.* 88–144). The author of the Pseudo-Aristotelian *Physiognomy*, the other main Greek source for such teachings in Arabic, acknowledges that there are some practitioners of physiognomy who take into account the characteristics of nations. Yet he rejects this method (Swain 2007, 639, 645; Ghersetti 1999, 20).

Another two features they share are the inclusion of animal similes and the protasis–apodosis form.These two points link the Indian and the Arabic systems of human marks with Greek physiognomy as manifested in the Pseudo-Aristotelian *Physiognomy*, dated from about 300 BCE and translated into Latin in the 13th century by Bartholomaeus de Messina at the court of Manfred I of Sicily (r. 1258–1266; Vogt 1999, 197; Foerster 1893, 4–91, vii–cxcii). Like the Indian sources, the two Greek texts use animal similes. In the Pseudo-Aristotelian physiognomy, the author questions the usefulness of these similes arguing that many animals share the same features, many of them have similar character traits, therefore establishing a correlation and resemblance with one animal is not possible. Furthermore, no human being looks like an animal but rather vaguely resembles one or another (Swain 2007, 639–41). Instead, he privileges human physical traits, although sometimes he compares them with those found in more than one animal to support a conclusion about the characteristic indication (Swain 2007, 641–3).

Nonetheless, a comparison of the Greek and Indian systems yields that the physiognomic marks in the Pseudo-Aristotelian text match well with those in the *Gārgīyajyotiṣa* (Zysk 2014, 2–3, 20, 25–6, 28–31, 39, 42–4, 46).

1.14.2 The emergence of physiognomy in Arabic

In comparison to astrology, alchemy and magic, Arabic physiognomy only appeared as the subject matter of entire treatises written by Muslim scholars relatively late (Hoyland 2007, 261–3). The earliest systematic Muslim-authored text dedicated solely to physiognomy is Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's (606/1210) *The Book on Physiognomy* (*Kitāb al-firāsa*). As a science, it does not appear in the classifications of al-Kindī (d. *c.* 256/870) and al-Farābī (d. 339/950–1), but we see it discussed by Ibn Sīnā (d. 428/1037), who considers it alongside medicine, astrology, oneiromancy, talismanry and alchemy as a natural science of a secondary order (Ibn Sīnā n.d., 110). This was taken up by three authors: the Cairene physician, herbalist and scholar Ibn al-Akfānī (d. 749/1348) in his *Guide for Those Aspiring to the Most Elevated Ends* (*Irshād al-qāṣid ilā asnā al-maqāṣid*), Ṭaşköprüzāde (d. 968/1561) in his *The Key to Felicity and the Lamp to Mastery on the Subject Matters of the Sciences* (*Miftāḥ al-saʿāda wa-miṣbāḥ al-siyāda fī mawḍūʿāt al-ʿulūm*) and Ḥajjī Khalīfa ([d. 1067/1657]; Kātib Chelebi) in his *Removal of Doubts on the Names of the Books and the Disciplines* (*Kashf al-ẓunūn ʿan asamī l-kutub wa-l-funūn*; Ghersetti 2007, 285–7; Ṭaşköprüzāde 1985, 1: 301–2; al-Shahrazūrī 1965, 1: 30).

However, in the form of translation, instruction on physiognomy could be acquired in Arabic already in the first half of the 3rd/9th century. The Pseudo-Aristotelian *Physiognomy* was the first Greek work on this subject to appear in Arabic. Its translator was Ḥunayn ibn Isḥāq (d. 260/873). A translation of Polemon's *Physiognomy* is the second oldest, from some time in the same period. The original translation is lost but formed the main source for the surviving Arabic renderings (Swain 2007, 2–4).

The racial interpretation of human marks evolved over time into a major theme of Arabic physiognomy, both on the scholarly and on the socioeconomic level. In the 6th/12th and 11th/16th centuries, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī and Ibn al-ʿUmarī (d. 965/1558), author of *The Human Delight in Human Physiognomy and the Satisfying Delight in Faith Physiognomy* (*al-Bahja al-insiyya fī l-firāsa al-insāniyya wa-l-bahja al-riḍḍiyya fī l-firāsa al-īmāniyya*), confirm physiognomy's major concern with races (*ajnās*). They count them among the strongest indicators of human character alongside natures, temperaments and ages since they constitute "essential qualities" (Ghersetti 1999, 8–9, 29–30; MSS London, British Library, Or. 8878, fols 9b–10a; Ankara, Milli Library, 4091, fols 4a–10a). This led to the production of physiognomies that primarily treat racial qualities to aid in selecting slaves such as a text known as *The Merits of Races* (*Maḥāsin al-ajnās*) dedicated to one of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Ayyūbī's (r. 564–589/1169–1193) descendants, and *The Correct Account of Choosing Slaves* (*al-Qawl al-sadīd fī khtiyār al-ʿabīd*) by the Egyptian scholar al-Amshāṭī (d. 902/1496). As a result of this ethno-stereotyping, physiognomy was integrated into Arabic economic literature, which primarily treated questions of how to run a household (Ghersetti 2007, 287). In relation to this, it has been shown that physiognomy played an administrative role as is evident in Ottoman manumission documents where the *hilye* (the physical appearance) of the slave was carefully described with the particularities of the texts on physiognomy discussed here. In addition to selecting and freeing slaves, physiognomy was widely employed in the forcible conscription of non-Muslim individuals from the Balkans (Sobers-Khan 2014, 98–9).

Animal traits as physiognomic marks became a second major theme in Arabic sources. Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī insisted on their importance, arguing that if the resemblance runs across an entire

species, and we can see in human beings with these resemblance similar internal traits, then we can legitimize this practice by the weight of the resemblances rather than differences. In addition, it is an accepted form of logic to connect the thing with that which it resembles, especially when it is corroborated by experience (al-Rāzī 1939, 21–2). A short time later, Shams al-Dīn al-Anṣārī included them in his *Epistle on the Science of Physiognomy* (*Risāla fī 'ilm al-firāsa*; MS Riyadh, University of Riyadh, 415, fols 7a–12a).

Thus, Arabic physiognomy was undoubtedly nourished by both Indian and Greek systems. But it also developed its own characteristics and orientations. Two of them, the central role of intuition and the emergence of a Sufi type of physiognomy, will be discussed in the next two sections.

I.14.3 Physiognomy as a science of intuition

Physiognomy was seen early on as based on intuition (*ḥads*). Defining *firāsa* in his dictionary *The Language of the Arabs* (*Lisān al-'Arab*), Ibn Manẓūr (630–711/1233–1312) explains:

> on the *ḥadīth*: "beware the *firāsa* of the believer", Ibn al-Athīr said: "it [*firāsa*] is said with two meanings: one of which is what the manifest [sense] of the *ḥadīth* signifies and it is what God Almighty brings down into the hearts of his Friends so they know the states of some people by way of charisma (*karāmāt*), correctness of guesswork (*ẓann*) and intuition (*ḥads*). The second is the type learned by signs, experience, features, and morals whereby people's states are known".
>
> *(Ibn Manẓūr n. d., 6: 159–60)*

On the other hand, al-Zamakhsharī (467–538/1074–1143), in *The Foundation of Eloquence* (*Asās al-balāgha*), defines judgment by intuition as physiognomy, associating it with guesswork (*ẓann*; al-Zamakhsharī 1998, 1: 174). As we shall see in the following, this association permeates the discussion of physiognomy beyond those early sources.

Intuition is also a central constituent of Avicennan epistemology. He considers it the movement of the mind that seeks the middle term[5] in a syllogism. Intelligibles can thus be acquired by intuition. Some individuals achieve this faster than others, and those who are able to come upon the middle term spontaneously are characterized by acumen (*dhakā'*). In this early phase of conceptualizing intuition, Ibn Sīnā considered it responsible for bringing the dispositional intellect to the level of the acquired intellect, that is, to intellectual perfection. Later, he revised this theory, seeing intuition no longer as the movement of the mind, fast or slow, but a spontaneous action, whereas thinking constitutes the movement (Gutas 2001, 3–5). Gutas explains that this difference is significant

> in emotional appeal and philosophical clarity. Intuition, regardless of its technical definition, is a difficult concept upon which to build an entire epistemological system, which may also explain why it was never fully appreciated by both medieval and modern scholars. Thinking is not; it is the most human of our faculties and one which is expected to lead the way in any epistemology.
>
> *(Gutas 2001, 26)*

Physiognomy's affinity with intuition, assumption and estimation (*takhmīn*) made it in the eyes of many Muslim scholars and courtiers an inferior science or skill, as its findings were not deemed to be based on rational, evidence-based thinking. The sharp-tongued secretary

and eloquent courtier *al-Tawḥīdī* (310–414/922–1023) established a kind of epistemic racial profiling by associating the Indians with intuition in contrast to the rationality of the Greeks: "deduction (*istinbāṭ*), in-depth study (*ghawṣ*), nuance (*tanqīr*), investigation (*baḥth*), exploration (*istikshāf*), examination (*istiqṣā'*) and thought (*fikr*) is for the Greeks, while imagination (*wahm*), intuition (*ḥads*), guesswork (*ẓann*), deception (*ḥīla*), trickery (*taḥayyul*) and sorcery (*sha'badha*) is for the Indians" (*al-Tawḥīdī* 2011, 147). The leading religious scholar of the 9th/11th century, al-Sharīf al-Jurjānī (740–816/1339–1413), took a general position independent of racial identities by juxtaposing intuition with thought in his *The Book of Definitions* (*Kitāb al-Ta'rīfāt*; al-Jurjānī 1983, 88).

Due to such cultural as well as scholarly positions, a lurking unease drove the codification of intuition in physiognomy. In the Pseudo-Aristotelian physiognomy, the author had already added a disclaimer: people who practice physiognomy need to be aware that many people experience several states of the soul yet have one demeanor, such as the brave and the imprudent. In fact, according to the Pseudo-Aristotelian physiognomy, there are only few people whose inner states can be detected through their exterior. The translator Ḥunayn ibn Isḥāq commented that Aristotle had only said this because he was surrounded by good people who were able to control the externalization of their inner states, but in Ḥunayn's time that was not the case, for those who could "control themselves" (*ḍabṭ al-nafs*) were the very few (Ghersetti 1999, 9). Pseudo-Aristotle continues and warns about another shortcoming of physiognomy and intuition:

> [I]t is possible for a person to imagine (*yatawahham*) that one of the signs is fixed (*thābit*) and verified and [yet is proven] false; what it indicates is correct except that this cannot always be so if this sign is not continuous and attached forever to that thing it indicates.
>
> *(Ghersetti 1999, 12)*

In a chapter on physiognomy in *The Book of Governance and Administration* (*Kitāb al-siyāsa fī tadbīr al-riyāsa*) – another Pseudo-Aristotelian text whose treatment of physiognomy became very influential – Alexander the Great, Aristotle's disciple, is advised by his master:

> O Alexander, do not be hasty in judgment based on a single sign, gather up all your indications. Whenever you are met with contradicting indications, lean towards the strongest and the most likely, and you shall be correct and succeed in your endeavours with the aid of God Almighty and His generosity.
>
> *(Badawī 1954, 124)*

Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī expresses the same condition, adding that a physiognomer must know that not all physical signs are manifest equally on everyone; some of them are more subtle than others. Al-Rāzī admits the possibility of signs contradicting one another. In this case, one must exercise *tarjīḥ* (speculation) and give preponderance to signs that appear on the physical parts associated with the trait one is inferring. For example, inferring courage from the chest is better than from the eyes. If the signs are equally contradicting in quality, quantity and value, then one must desist altogether. Finally, he warns, as did the author of the Pseudo-Aristotelian physiognomy, that some people have various inner states but a single demeanor, such as brave and impudent individuals (al-Rāzī 1939, 26–30).

In *The Merits of Races*, the author confirms that enslaving men, women and boys based on their features is supported by "people of intuition and physiognomy" (*ahl al-ḥads wa-l-firāsa*; MS London, British Library, Or. 7592, fol. 2b). However, in physiognomy's defense, he distances it from the pitfalls of intuition. He writes: "[P]hysiognomy is not like intuition (*al-ḥads*) and

assumptions, because intuition and assumptions do not result from consideration and observation (*naẓar wa-mushāhada*), and physiognomy results only from analysis and observation." Intuition, according to him, involves understanding a situation by relating it to other events or indications, such as telling whether a running woman is pregnant from the way she holds her belly. Notwithstanding, physiognomy and intuition are skills that can be found in one person since they both require intelligence (MS London, British Library, Or. 7592, fols 3b–4a).

Physiognomy is not the only science that is intuition-in-practice. Astrology and medicine are often presented as – or challenged for – being such practices. It is useful to situate physiognomy relative to these sciences in order to understand the epistemological class to which it belonged and to highlight the link physiognomy itself has had with these two sciences.

The anxiety surrounding intuitive knowledge is repeatedly expressed in astrological literature. In his magnum opus, *The Great Introduction to Astrology* (*Kitāb al-Madkhal al-kabīr ilā ʿilm aḥkām al-nujūm*), Abū Maʿshar (171–272/787–886) defends astrology's rationale, writing that

> [m]any people thought astrology is something stumbled upon by intuition and estimation (*ḥads wa-takhmīn*) without having a sound origin with which to work or from which syllogisms can be made . . . and so we composed our present book to establish the judgments [of astrology] with convincing arguments and evidence . . . and whatever that is not there can be deduced by those who know the foundations of this practice.
>
> *(Abū Maʿshar 1995–1996 [CB], 2: Bk. 1, Ch. 1, 3–4)*

The juxtaposition between evidence-based knowledge and intuition is explicit here. The word Abū Maʿshar uses for intuition is *ḥads*. For astrology, he favors the Aristotelian model of scientific substantiation: "Most of the science of the judgments [of the stars] is manifest, visible, and clear, and that part not manifest is inferred by clear syllogism from the science of the nature of things and from the powers of the planetary motions manifest in this world" (Abū Maʿshar 1995–1996, 2: Bk. 1, Ch. 2, 7). Following this assertion, he gives examples of non-astrological inferences and predictions that common people (*al-ʿāmma*) engage in: knowledge that can be described as physiognomic. For example, they know if a woman is pregnant when her eyes are hollow and her eyelids droopy, having pure-looking pupils and thick white sclera (Abū Maʿshar 1995–1996 [CB], 2: 11).

Contradicting Abū Maʿshar's statement, Ibn Khaldūn (732–808/1332–1406) undermines astrology by overemphasizing its reliance on intuition:

> Some people claim that there exist ways of perceiving the unknown without loss of sense. Among them are the astrologers who refer to astral indications . . . these astrologers have [attained] nothing of the unknown; it is merely intuitive guesswork and estimation (*ẓunūn ḥadsiyya wa-takhmīnāt*) based on astral influences . . . even if it were confirmed, the means is [still] intuition and guesswork.
>
> *(Ibn Khaldūn 2005[CB], 1: 226)*

Ibn Khaldūn was responding to a long and firm tradition established by Abū Maʿshar of an Aristotelianized and naturalized astrology according to which the stars signify sublunary events and influence minerals, plants, animals and humans, because they are the efficient causes of their generation and thus have a formal link to them (Saif 2015, 9–16).

As for medicine, according to the physician Ibn Abī Uṣaybiʿa (d. 668/1270), there are three diagnostic skills in medicine: inspiration (*ilhām*), intuition (*ḥads*) and inference (*istinbāṭ*) (Ibn

Abī Uṣaybiʿa n.d.[CB], 1: 158–160, 2020[CB], 1.2). In fact, he asserts, "[M]ost of the practice of medicine is intuition (*ḥads*) and estimation (*takhmīn*) and rarely is certitude involved" (Ibn Abī Uṣaybiʿa n. d., 4: 359, 2020, 15. 51. 8. 24). Error is particularly associated with intuition. Authors of physiognomic and medical literature agree in this point. But practitioners with intelligence, experience and experimentation can often avoid errors and establish probability (Ibn Abī Uṣaybiʿa n. d., 1: 156–62, 2020, 1.2). Other works confirm that the concept of intuition also played an important role in therapeutic practices. In his *The Compendium of Simple Medicaments and Foods* (*Jāmiʿ li-mufradāt al-adwiya wa-l-aghdhiya*), Ibn al-Bayṭār (593–646/1197–1248), a leading specialist of *materia medica* in his time, describes the administration of medicinal material as based on an intuitive impulse (Ibn al-Bayṭār 1992, 4: 354).

The integration of various fields of contested knowledge into the disciplinary canon of knowledge in different Islamicate societies was not achieved at the same time and through the same cultural and epistemic processes. Magic, for instance, gained its stable place as a natural science, especially between the 3rd/9th and the 6th/12th centuries, by incorporating concepts, theories and methods from astrology. Physiognomy, in contrast, solidified its position through medicalization. The main idea around which this process revolved is that "thoughts (*afkār*) and mindsets (*ʿuqūl*) follow bodily states" (Ghersetti 1999, 3). Through the practice of commenting, Ḥunayn refined this notion from the Pseudo-Aristotelian physiognomy. Citing Galen, he reflected on the body–soul interlink: the powers of the soul are affected by the temperaments (*mizāj*; Ghersetti 1999, 4). Galen, indeed, expressed such an opinion in the tract *That the Power of the Soul Follows the Temperament of the Body* (*Fī anna quwwat al-nafs tābiʿa li-mizāj al-badan*). Ḥunayn was familiar with this Galenic treatise, because he had translated it himself. Thus, various textual practices such as translating, reading, memorizing and commenting came together in setting the path for physiognomy to become a natural science of intuition. A further step was assured through the anonymous author of *The Book of Governance*. Ascribing the work to Aristotle, the author insists that an essential part of "spiritual medicine" – that complements physical medicine – is "sensing the soul through the manifest marks." He adds that such a practice is reliant on *ẓann* (guesswork), which is also instrumental in *kihāna* (divination) part of which is physiognomy (Badawī 1954, 116).

The most systematic medicalization of physiognomic intuition was undertaken by Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī in his *Book on Physiognomy* (Akasoy 2008, 129–30). He asserts: "[T]he foundations of this sciences are based on the natural science and its branches as ascertained by experience. It is like medicine on all levels; therefore, any slander directed at this science is exactly that directed at medicine" (al-Rāzī 1939, 6). Furthermore, the physiognomer has to know all the things that make up the temperament including the Aristotelian four causes: material, formal, efficient, teleological. The material cause is composed of the organs, spirit, the four natures and the elements. The formal has effect on the temperaments and physical abilities; and the agent is the cause of health or illness. Concerning the causes of health and illness, there are six: air, food, sleep, wakefulness, motion and stillness, purging, congestion and psychological influences. The physiognomer should be able to observe and delineate the links between the external marks, the character and mindset of the individual and their physical state (al-Rāzī 1939, 8–9).

This alliance between medicine and physiognomy is understandable. In addition to being the only natural sciences that "have the human body as object and remain anchored to the present", they both operate within "the paradigm of semiotic inference" that through observing symptoms/marks reveals states hidden from the immediate senses (Ghersetti 2007, 285). The practical codification of physiognomy and its theoretical conceptualization as intuition-based medical practice secured a place for it in the natural sciences. However, for Fakhr al-Dīn, the diagnosis

of the physiognomer and the physician must also be fortified with astrology, sharp senses and long experience (al-Rāzī 1939, 28).

I.14.4 Esotericization of physiognomy

The medical framework given to physiognomy did not detract from it being perceived as ultimately reflecting a type of insight that was associated with piety and devoutness. The Qur'ān appears to sanction such an association: "In this are signs for the *mutawassimūn* (the marked ones)" (Qur'ān15: 75). The last word is equated, in widely accepted interpretations, with *mutafarrisūn*, meaning those who discern by signs (Hoyland 2007, 240). Furthermore, in a *ḥadīth*, it is reported that the Prophet said: "Beware the *firāsa* of the believer, for he sees with the light of God" (Hoyland 2005, 363–4). The great legal scholar and imam al-Shāfiʿī (d. 204/820) was famed for his skill in physiognomy. The story goes that he collected many books on the subject during a trip to Yemen. It is said that he composed a text on the subject, but this is doubtful (Hoyland 2007, 241–3). Mystics and ascetics capitalized on this kind of physiognomy to distinguish it from a more mundane type based on mere knowledge of physical marks and signs (Hoyland 2005, 387).

The spiritual correlation of appearances and morals became so entrenched that it appeared in Ottoman art practices in the form of the *hilye-i şerîfe* (noble *hilye*), the verbal calligraphic portrait of the physical appearance and moral character of the Prophet Muḥammad. It is based on the content of certain *ḥadīths* that became popular in the Ottoman empire, in addition to a popular devotional poem in Ottoman Turkish, the *Hilye-i hakanī*, composed in the later 16th century. The earliest dated examples of the prophetic *hilye* belong to the later decades of the 17th century, usually credited to the calligrapher Ḥāfiẓ ʿOs̱mān ([1052–1110/1642–1698]; Stanley 2018, 559–60; Schick 2008; Derman 1998, 34–7). The most common text used in constructing the *hilye* is from a *ḥadīth* attributed to the Prophet's cousin ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib (d. 40/661):

> He was neither very tall nor excessively short but was a man of medium size. He had neither very curly nor flowing hair but a mixture of the two. He was not obese. He did not have a very round face, but it was so to some extent. He was reddish-white. He had wide black eyes and long eyelashes. He had protruding joints and shoulder blades. He was not hairy but had some hair on his chest. The palms of his hands and his feet were calloused. When he walked, he raised his feet as though he were walking on a slope. When he turned around, he turned completely. Between his shoulders was the seal of prophecy, and he was the seal of the prophets.
>
> *(Stanley 2018, 562)*

Tim Stanley suggests that gazing at the *hilye* – an important devotional practice in the Ottoman period – may have been connected with Sufi practices such as *naẓar* (contemplating divine beauty by gazing at human beauty), in combination with the anti-image culture of the Naqshabandi Sufi order and others (Stanley 2018, 570). In this way, the Prophetic *hilye* becomes an object of contemplating the perfect alignment of *khalq* and *akhlāq* in the person of Muḥammad.

Prior to the rise of systematized and institutionalized Sufism in the 6th/12th and the 7th/13th centuries, the Abbasid translations and intellectual activities between the 2nd/8th and the 4th/10th centuries fostered and established a scientific episteme that integrated astrology, alchemy, magic and divination as part of the natural sciences that grapple with phenomena such as action at a distance and, in the case of divination, intuition. The mentioned changes in Sufism led to a shift in the perceived paradigms of legitimacy applied to the occult sciences. Now revelatory forms of

knowing the hidden became privileged (Saif 2017). As a result, physiognomy was spoken of as a revelatory science practiced by an elite group of mystics. However, in that discourse, physiognomy seems to be less about intuiting through physical signs but rather simply an accurate, unerring and unmediated intuition. In his *The Ranks of Sufis* (*Ṭabaqāt al-ṣūfiyya*), the Sufi hagiographer al-Sulamī (325–412/937–1021) cites a certain Abū ʿUthmān Saʿīd al-Naysābūrī defining *firāsa* as "guesswork (*ẓann*) consistent with truth; for guesswork is hit and miss, if it is verified as *firāsa*, it is verified as judgment" (al-Sulamī 2003, 143). In *The Qushayriyan Epistle* (*al-Risāla al-qushayriyya*), the Sufi al-Qushayrī (d. 465/1072), who references al-Sulamī, dedicates an entire chapter to the subject giving many definitions of *firāsa* as a spontaneous divinely supported act, including "an occurrence of thought in the heart that refutes what negates it" (al-Qushayrī 1989, 398).

Ibn al-ʿArabī (558–638/1165–1240) subscribed to a similar view (Akasoy 2008, 119–29). In a chapter titled "On the Prestige of Physiognomy and its Secrets", in *The Meccan Disclosures* (*al-Futūḥāt al-makiyya*), Ibn al-ʿArabī tells us that the people who can be "read" by *firāsa* are the *shawārid*, meaning those whose consciousness strays from the divine and who are too attached to their corporeality. They fear the dispraise of the physiognomer who sees their spiritual flaws and vulnerabilities. Furthermore, there are two kinds of physiognomy: one described as natural (*ṭabīʿiyya*) and medical (*ḥikmiyya*), resulting from the physical temperament (*mizājiyya*), and another, spiritual (*rūḥāniyya*), of the soul (*nafsiyya*), founded on faith (*īmāniyya*) and divine matters (*ilāhiyya*). Natural physiognomy looks for physical marks on bodies that differ according to the diversity of natural temperaments due to the harmony (*ulfa*) decreed by God between the four natures and elements. A semi-substantial (medical) spirit mediates between these mixtures and the composite whole. As a result, the balance or imbalance of the temperament manifests on the body and affects the soul and character. Ibn al-ʿArabī elaborates on some of these physical-marks and their significances. Divine physiognomy, however, is revelatory, resulting from a divine light pouring into "the eye of insight", revealing the inner states of individuals without recourse to physical marks. It is a talent attained by the faithful whose heart is illuminated by divine light as a result of fixating consciousness on divine attributes and names. So, if people of balanced temperament are ignorant of salvific means, they can consult the *ʿulamāʾ* (experts), including physiognomers for aid. The latter can also guide toward bliss and salvation those whose souls are astray (*munḥarif, shārid*) and whose temperaments are imbalanced (Ibn al-ʿArabī 2006, 1: 354–63). This exposition is also found in his *Divine Affairs* (*al-Tadbīrāt al-ilāhiyya*) in a chapter titled "On Religious and Medical Physiognomy" (Ibn al-ʿArabī 2003, 58–69).

Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, an aspiring mystic, also makes this distinction. In his *The Lofty Aspirations* and *The Book on Physiognomy* he speaks of "spiritual physiognomy" revealed to the heart without reliance on any physical signs. It is attained by souls characterized by transparency and luminescence due to their detachment from material things. Physiognomy in sleep belongs to this type. The second and natural type is inference through manifest states and marks that reveal hidden or inner states: "This is a science with reliable foundations, [but] assumptive in its branches (*ʿilm yaqīnī al-uṣūl, ẓannī al-furūʿ*)" (al-Rāzī 1939, 6–7). Al-Rāzī implies that, unlike its natural counterpart, spiritual physiognomy cannot err, being a divine inspiration. Thus, it is exempt from the tension present in trusting intuition from which natural physiognomy suffers. He writes:

> One of the Sufis was asked about the difference between these two parts. He said, "Guesswork (*ẓann*) occurs from the turning over of signs by the heart. [Faith-based] physiognomy happens by the disclosure of the light of the Lord of the Heavens."
>
> *(Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, MS London, British Library, Or. 7592, fol. 2b)*

This is the physiognomy of the prophets and the saints (*awliyāʾ*). Education and training are required for the natural-physical type (al-Rāzī 1939, 6–7; also see al-Rāzī n. d., VIII: 145).

As mentioned earlier, al-Anṣārī dedicated an entire treatise to physiognomy, and there its revelatory aspect is clearly articulated (Akasoy 2008, 131–4). His sources as he lists them are al-Shāfiʿī, Ibn al-ʿArabī, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, Aristotle, Polemon, Hippocrates and Indian sources (MS Riyadh, University of Riyadh, 415, fol. 1a). The distinction he offers between natural and revelatory physiognomy is taken almost verbatim from Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (MS Riyadh, University of Riyadh, 415, fols. 3a–4a). In similar words as Fakhr al-Dīn, al-Anṣārī asserts that the epistemological foundations of natural physiognomy are identical to medicine, that is, intuiting inner moral and physical states from outer marks (MS Riyadh, University of Riyadh, 415, fols 2a–b).

Physiognomy set within a Sufi discourse is also found in the *Ranks of the Wayfarers* (*Madārij al-sālikīn*) by the theologian Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (961–751/1292–1350). He opted for the literary technique of commentary to talk about physiognomy, although he is also known for his traditionalist stance discrediting occult practices. His text is mainly a commentary on *The Stations of the Wayfarers* (*Manāzil al-Sāʾirīn*) by the Persian Sufi al-Harawī (396–481/1005–1089). In it, al-Jawziyya speaks of three types of physiognomy. The first is called faith-based (*īmāniyya*). It is the "sharpest" since it is "a light cast down by God into the heart of the believer". Reports from the *salaf* (the predecessors) is given in support of this type, where we are told that the Rightly Guided Caliphs, Abū Bakr (r. 11–13/632–634), ʿUmar and ʿUthmān (r. 23–35/644–656), were among the best skilled in faith-based physiognomy. He cites the legendary ascetic Abū Jaʿfar al-Ḥaddād saying "physiognomy is the first thought without objection," which echoes al-Qushayrī's aforementioned definition (al-Jawziyya 2001, 2: 192–4). The second is physiognomy by asceticism (*firāsat al-riyāḍa wa-l-jūʿ wa-l-sahar wa-l-takhallī*/ physiognomy by discipline, hunger, sleeplessness and abstinence). This is a universal way of attaining the skill "shared between the faithful and the infidel; it indicates neither faith nor allegiance" (al-Jawziyya 2001, 2: 194). Monks are known for it. Unlike the first type of physiognomy, this one gives partial information. Therefore, it is useless and leads astray. The third is physical physiognomy, which is adopted by physicians who observe external signs to learn about internal natures. Al-Jawziyya seems to approve of it (al-Jawziyya 2001, 2: 194–6). Based on the teachings of al-Harawī, al-Jawziyya, furthermore, mentions three degrees of physiognomy. The first is common physiognomy, which occurs very rarely to those mindless of God without any knowledge of how it took place. It could be an afflatus for the sake of warning or delivering good tidings, but it could also be demonic inspiration to undermine faith and cause fear. The second degree is the physiognomy of the faithful, and it is pure divine inspiration. Finally, there is "esoteric physiognomy" (*firāsa sirriyya*), which occurs to the noblest souls concerned with secrets and is articulated either explicitly or in symbols (al-Jawziyya 2001, 2: 197–200). In his exposition on physiognomy, al-Jawziyya incorporates physiognomy into the strata of spiritual development and thus stretches further the spectrum, which usually begins with the discursive-physical and ends with nondiscursive and revelatory (generally ideologically neutral) by distinguishing universal asceticism from a "mysticism" that is pronouncedly Islamic, privileging the physiognomy of the latter.

Esoteric physiognomy is also found in the aforementioned *Human Delight*, clearly inspired by Ibn al-ʿArabī's taxonomy and terminology. Ibn al-ʿUmarī cites Polemon, the two Rāzīs, in addition to Ibn al-ʿArabī and al-Qushayrī (London, British Library, Or. 8878, fol. 2a–b). Here, too, he speaks of physical physiognomy and faith-based physiognomy (*īmāniyya*), the latter being revelatory (*bi-l-mukāshafa*; MS London, British Library, Or. 8878, 2a–b). Ibn al-ʿUmarī begins with physical physiognomy, emphasizing its link with medicine, often borrowing verbatim from Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (MS London, British Library, Or. 8878, fols. 3b–6b). Curiously, Ibn al-ʿUmarī equates revelatory physiognomy with the inherent and inspired

behavior of some animals, namely, bees and hoopoes. The first is honored by an entire *sūra* of the Qurʾān, and the other is depicted there as Solomon's trusty servant who brings him news of Balqīs in Saba' (Yemen; MS London, British Library, Or. 8878, f. 7b; Qurʾān 16 [The Bees]; Qurʾān 27: 20, 27–28). Being divinely guided, this type of physiognomy is not tarnished by *ẓann* and never fails (London, British Library, Or. 8878, fol. 8b). The treatise ends by exhorting the reader to employ what can be called reflective physiognomy. It is directing one's insight into the self, evaluating its preoccupations, values and behaviors. On judgment day, as the Qurʾān pronounces, one's own exterior – legs, hands, tongue and so on – shall stand witness to one's interior states; people's eternal destiny will manifest on their faces. It is the day of complete externalization of the inner state of being (MS London, British Library, Or. 8878, fols. 27a–28b).

I.12.5 Concluding Remarks

This chapter considered physiognomy as a set of practices based on intuition. As such, investment in speculative knowledge (*ḥads*, *ẓann*, *takhmīn*), no matter how systematized, required legitimization. This was carried out mostly through medicalization from the 3rd/9th to the 6th/12th centuries, and later, due to the systematization of Sufism, through its transformation into a part of esoteric doctrines and practices. The first process consolidated physiognomy's association with natural philosophy, contending at some point with an explicit esotericism that reclaimed physiognomy as a passively attained token of the spiritual elite. Recognizing the epistemological shifts that underlie these two practices frees us from the ossified perception that the occult sciences, including astrology and magic, occupy a marginal space contoured according to the value of their end results and claims, and anachronistically measured according to our own intellectual and epistemological borders. Simultaneously, by identifying the universal phenomenon physiognomy grapples with, namely, intuition, we begin to discern a scientific and philosophical concern that is still relevant today. In the field of medicine today, the role of intuition is acknowledged as a diagnostic factor that sometimes challenges evidence-based medicine yet plays a role in clinical decision-making (Greenhalg 2002, 395–400). Physiognomy was applied in economics, particularly in slave trading. It was valorized in Islamicate courts, especially among the Ottomans. It provided guidelines for selecting members of the ruling elite and a tool for imperial propaganda that was buttressed by racial profiling. Physiognomy as a science of intuition was utilized for decision-making pertaining to the management of body, society and state administration (Lelić 2017, 623–6; Chapter II.10).

Notes

1 Consoldated bibliography.
2 The dating and identity of those scholars is highly contested. For a survey on those problems, see Callataÿ 2013 and a new alternative interpretation by De Vaulx d'Arcy 2019.
3 Chiromancy is the divinatory practice of reading the features of the hands, including, but not restricted to, the lines of the palm. In Arabic, it is known as *ʿilm al-kaff* (the science of the palm) or *ʿilm sarāʾir al-kaff* (the science of the palm's lines). Pedomancy is examining the soles of the feet to divine the future and to diagnose personality traits and health conditions and tendencies.
4 Protasis and apodosis: the two basic constituents of a conditional sentence. Protasis (literally, what stands before) is the antecedent clause that expresses the condition, the "if clause". Apodosis (literally, what comes after) is the clause that expresses the consequence.
5 The term appearing in both premises of a syllogism but missing in the conclusion. For example, all men are human; Socrates is a man; therefore, Socrates is a human; here, *man/men* is the middle term.

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