

The Divine Names: A Mystical Theology of the Names of God in the Qur'an

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ʿAFĪF AL-DĪN AL-TILIMSĀNĪ, TRANSLATED BY
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The publication of *The Divine Names: A Mystical Theology of the Names of God in the Qur'an* marks a noteworthy addition to the growing body of literature on Islamic metaphysics, Qur'anic hermeneutics, and Sufi theology. Composed by the understudied yet intellectually formidable North African Sufi ʿAfīf al-Dīn al-Tilimsānī, this work represents one of the most philosophically nuanced treatments of the divine names (*alasmāʾ alḥusnā*) in the intellectual tradition left by Ibn al-ʿArabī. Al-Tilimsānī is directly linked to Ibn al-ʿArabī through his master Muʿayyad al-Dīn al-Jandī (d. 690/1291) and his master's master Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī (d. 673/1274), Ibn al-ʿArabī's direct disciple/stepson. Casewit's preface details al-Tilimsānī's multi-lingual cosmopolitan training and travels from Zayyanid-ruled Tlemcen to Seljuk/Mongol-ruled Konya to Mamluk-ruled Cairo and Damascus. These cities, we are informed, form a pan-Islamic Sunni Sufi nexus threaded across a cluster of Sunni dynasties of the time. Contextualized, edited from multiple manuscripts, translated, explicated,

and intertextually grounded by Yousef Casewit, this bilingual volume brings to light a major source that has hitherto remained inaccessible to non-Arabic-speaking audiences.

AlTilimsānī's treatise systematically engages with each of the one-hundred-forty-six Qur'anic divine names' ontological, cosmological, ethical, ritual, and epistemological implications. We are told that one-hundred-forty-four divine names, *the branches*, interpenetrate one another on multiple scales as they are grounded by two focal ur-names, *Allah* and *al-Raḥmān*. These are the first two divine names mentioned in the first Basmalah of the Qur'an, entangling canonical literary sequential orders to ontological gradational functions. In alTilimsānī's system the divine name *Allah* subsumes names of transcendence, the multi-modal divine majesty, as *al-Raḥmān* incorporates names of immanence, the Pleroma of divine beatitude. The vertical bifurcation between *root* and *branch* names is compounded to a horizontal split of apophatic *branch* majestic names, under their *root Allah*, and cataphatic *branch* beatific names, under their *root al-Raḥmān*. These names are not merely linguistic attributes but concrete manifestations of the stratified divine presence in the cosmos. As the theurgic substructure of the cosmos, the Qur'anic names of God act as loci for the spiritual ascension of the believer up the tree of divine names, culminating in the unnamable zenith. AlTilimsānī's spirituality is intertextually entrenched in predecessors such as alBayhaqī, alGhazālī, and Ibn Barrajān (with occasional mentions of al-Niffarī). This mention of scholars who lived prior to Ibn al-ʿArabī grounds his methodological allegiance to the Akbarian school in the broader Sufi historical trajectory. His commitment to this particular school allows him to tread the straight-narrow path between metaphysical abstraction and ritually grounded mystical empiricism. The metaphysical vocabulary and conceptual apparatus throughout the work reflects alTilimsānī's continuation of prior Sunni theologians/mystics' deep engagement with philosophical traditions synthesized within a ritually practiced Sufi Qur'anic worldview.

Perhaps the most significant contribution of this volume is that it introduces a complex yet neglected figure to Anglophone Islamic studies. AlTilimsānī's integration of philosophical precision with mystical

insight expands the parameters of the discourse on divine names, often dominated by either devotional or lexicographic treatments. Unlike alGhazālī's more moralistic reading or Ibn Qayyim alJawziyya's polemics, alTilimsānī's engagement is ontological and metaphysically nuanced. The methodological rigor of the work is another notable strength. AlTilimsānī's treatment is systematic, and his conceptual clarity reflects the influence of the metaphysical logic characteristic of Ibn al'Arabī's disciples. Each name is not only discussed individually but also situated in a broader matrix of overlapping meanings, gradations of manifestation, and cosmic functions. Casewit's editorial and translational approach further enhances the accessibility and academic utility of the volume. His careful translation, historical contextualization, clarificatory explanations, and intertextual footnotes allows the reader to navigate alTilimsānī's dense formulations without sacrificing the complexity of the original text.

At the same time, despite its many strengths the translated work may prove challenging for readers unfamiliar with Islamic philosophy or technical Sufi metaphysics. The philosophical density and occasional abstraction—though intrinsic to the genre—may limit its pedagogical use in undergraduate settings or among general audiences. While the translation includes references to alTilimsānī's predecessors, a deeper comparative analysis with the school's founder—vis-à-vis Ibn al'Arabī's *alasmā' alḥusnā*—would enrich scholarly understanding of the subtle departures and innovations alTilimsānī's treatise introduces. Casewit alludes to these connections, but further work could explain them more directly.

This edition offers substantial contributions across multiple domains of Islamic studies: Sufi studies, Qur'anic theology, and Islamic philosophy. In Sufi studies, it provides a fresh perspective on post-Ibn al-'Arabī mystical metaphysics. In Qur'anic theology, it demonstrates a unique hermeneutical approach to divine names as multi-dimensional operative hierophanic realities, not merely descriptive labels. In Islamic philosophy, it engages with ontological and epistemic categories that uniquely bridge Peripatetic, Neoplatonic, and Illuminationist frameworks. The work invites further research into how divine names are

ritually operationalized in Sufi praxis and how they ontically inform both speculative theology and ethical conduct. It also raises important questions for comparative theology, particularly in interfaith kataphatic/apophatic discussions.

In conclusion, *The Divine Names: A Mystical Theology of the Names of God in the Qur'an* is a masterfully edited and translated work that opens a vital chapter in the intellectual history of Sufi Islam. 'Afif alDīn alTilimsānī's complex yet rewarding synthesis of philosophy and mysticism provides scholars with a new framework for understanding the divine names of the Qur'an not only as theological constructs but as metaphysical realities shaping the cosmos and the human soul. Casewit's scholarship renders this profound tradition accessible without diminishing its depth, making the volume essential reading for those engaged in Qur'anic studies, Sufi thought, and Islamic metaphysics.

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