

Note on the Term *al-mushtarī* and the Dating of Leiden Or. 1020a

Boris Liebreuz

Leipzig

liebreuz@rz.uni-leipzig.de

This small communication is prompted by a passage in Joep Lameer's interesting article on Avicenna's *Kitāb al-Ishārāt* in a previous number of this journal.¹ The author rightfully questions the dating of an old—purportedly the oldest—manuscript of the text to before 408AH on account of a purchase note supposedly from that year.

In this note, the main undated statement of purchase is supplemented in the margin, but clearly in the same hand, with two words and one number written in three lines. This clearly written note has hitherto been interpreted as: “*al-mushtarī / sana / 408*,” which translates as “the buyer/ [in the] year / 408.”

The dating itself can be dismissed with a swift glance at the much younger handwriting, but the meaning of the number, so clearly decipherable, needs explanation. If it was not an outright forgery, what does it signify? Lameer consulted Jan Just Witkam who suggested reading the digits in reverse order, i.e. 804AH. In turn, Adam Gacek confirmed the rare existence of this phenomenon but with the caveat that he only knew of Indian examples. Since this is clearly not an Indian manuscript and the hand appears younger than 804AH, further explorations are called for.

Drawing from a vast number of notes that I have collected over the past five years,² I would like to offer another interpretation. It is my assumption that

1 J. Lameer, “Towards a new edition of Avicenna's *Kitāb al-Ishārāt wa-l-tanbihāt*” in: *Journal of Islamic Manuscripts* 4 (2013): 199–248, the passage in question p. 210.

2 To establish this corpus, I have collected the secondary notes (statements of ownership, private reading, public reading, endowments, borrowing, births and deaths, etc.) from manuscripts I could inspect at Beirut American University, Berlin Staatsbibliothek (collections Landberg, Sprenger, Wetzstein I + II, Ms.or.oct., Ms.or.quart), Gotha Forschungsbibliothek, Halle, Leipzig, and Tübingen, as well as material from online digitized collections (mainly Dublin, Harvard, Michigan, Paris) and the few catalogues mentioning these notes in a more or

the problem is not, in fact, posed by the numerals, but rather the apparently unequivocal terms written above them. I submit that both words, as clearly written as they may seem, have been deciphered incorrectly, until now.

Let us start with *al-mushtarī*. It is translated here as the buyer, a term that does exist, albeit rarely, in the corpus of notes I have collected. However, it is always embedded in an unequivocal syntactic structure and followed directly by the name of the buyer designated.³ By contrast, a substantial number of notes exist in which the same grapheme should be read as *al-mushtarā*, the object or act of purchase. While this term, too, is uncommon, overall it is sufficiently well attested, with a wide chronological and regional range from the 8th/14th to the 13th/19th century and from Egypt to Baghdad. It is generally encountered in three forms: undetermined,⁴ determined with an article,⁵ or determined by the personal suffix *-hū*.⁶ Ordinarily, it is directly followed by

less systematic manner. Two online databases have been established to present the material from Berlin (<http://orient-digital.staatsbibliothek-berlin.de/content/main/search-secentry.xml>) and Leipzig (www.refaiya.uni-leipzig.de/content/main/search-secentry.xml) with all necessary metadata on the persons, places, dates, etc., as well as referencing the findings from other collections where connections can be made. In a current project, a third database is being established, containing the notes of the roughly 3,000 Oriental manuscripts of the Universitäts- und Forschungsbibliothek Gotha.

3 *min al-mushtarī* + name: Gotha orient. A 1222 (dated 954), Leipzig Vollers 172.

4 *bi-mushtarā* + name: Berlin Ms. or. quart. 1072 (Damascus);

mushtarā min + name: Gotha orient. A 746 (dated 1195), Gotha orient. A 1630 (dated 1103), Gotha orient. A 1683, Gotha orient. A 1784;

one occurrence of a female form, *mushtarāt* + name, either by way of mistake or with reference to a female designate for the object of purchase, like *nuskha* or *mujallada*: Wetzstein II 1372 (after 1172, before 1270);

mushtarā min + place: Berlin Sprenger 798 (dated 955, Cairo), Berlin Wetzstein II 174 (dated 1271, Damascus);

mushtarā fi + place: Beirut AUB MS 520.956 R59rA (dated 1248, Alexandria);

mushtarā + price: Gotha orient. A 1813.

5 *šāra bi-ḥukm al-mushtarā*: Leipzig Vollers 313; *bi-ṭarīq al-mushtarā*: Wetzstein II 186 (dated 1122, Damascus); *al-mushtarā min* + name: Beirut AUB MS 610 B33fA (dated 926). Once, a plural is formed, *min al-mushtarayāt*: Vollers 41.

6 *mushtarāhu min* + name: Beirut AUB MS 160 Y95kA (dated 1841AD), Beirut AUB MS 349.297 R89 (dated 774), Berlin Ms. or. oct. 433, Berlin Wetzstein II 1877 (after 1065), Leipzig Vollers 746 (dated 1740).

mushtarāhu min + place: Gotha orient. A 299 (Cairo), Tübingen MA VI 174 (dated 1845AD, near Latakia).

mushtarāhu bi- + place: Wetzstein II 1662 (Damascus).

mushtarāhu + price: Gotha orient. A 1999 (dated 1210), Gotha orient. A 2007, Gotha orient. A 2305 (dated 1136), Gotha orient. A 2829, Michigan Isl. Ms. 616 (Baghdad).

mushtarāhu + date: Gotha orient. A 1435 (Ramla).

the particles *min* or *fī/bi-*, which are attached to names of persons or places to denote either the source or place of purchase, i.e. the vendor, a city or the book market.

Admittedly, this emendation does little to solve the problem of the supposed date. What, then, are we to make of the word *sana*? Here, I would suggest a more radical rereading. Interesting in this regard are no less than six notes in which a form of *mushtarā* is directly followed by a price, without any intermediary information. This is in contrast to only one case where it is followed by a date. In the majority of cases, the term *mushtarā* is the first part of a bracket that encloses a changing number of elements—usually, name, place, or date—and faces, on the other end, a price. The price is most commonly indicated by the terms *thamanuhū*, *al-thaman*, *qadruhū* or *qīmatuhū*, clearly none of which can be read here. On closer examination, however, the standard term for price, *siʿr*,—although rarely attested in manuscript notes—appears to be a real possibility, even when a change from *hāʾ/tāʾ marbūʿa* to *rāʾ* and from *nūn* to *ʿayn* initially seems radical. As a comparison, there is an identical *rāʾ* just above, in the word *mushtarā*. On the other hand, a final *hāʾ* is attested eight times in the main entry and in two different forms, one of which resembles the letter as it is interpreted in the word *sana*. While this final letter could definitively be a *hāʾ* as well as a *rāʾ*, the form of the proposed *nūn* seems less convincing: it would seem to lack the basic “tooth” with only a rather bold dot blotted, unlike anywhere else in the note, directly on the line. Therefore, the reading of *ʿayn* proposed here might be less than certain, but is probably just as good as the reading *nūn*.

Two of the closest—formally—parallel notes may support my suggested interpretation. They are taken from Wetzstein II 1662, where both elements are found directly adjacent to each other but appear in a reversed order with the price preceding the term *mushtarāhu*; and Wetzstein II 1877, where only an additional name between *mushtarā* and the price differs from Leiden Or. 1020a.

Berlin Wetzstein II 1662

قيمته
غروش 3
وثلاث
مشتراه بجامع الا
موي بالكناسة 7

Berlin Wetzstein II 1877

مشترا من الشيخ محمد
ابن الشيخ ابراهيم (اغا)
الثلث
مصرية
24

The point attached to the numeral 4, already noted by Lameer and interpreted as a signal to start the reading in the reverse order, may still be of significance here, although I am not able to say with certitude what it would mean. Prices often use visual devices to differentiate between currency units, e.g. the bigger unit *ghurūsh* being written with a bigger and bolder digit than the sub-unit *bāra* or *miṣrīya*. Something similar may have been applied here. The price would then probably consist of four items of the bigger, unnamed currency unit and nine of the smaller, but this is speculative. Far more certain is the nature of this note. Taken together, the references collected strongly suggest that the numbers in Leiden Or. 1020a should be read not as a date, but rather as the price of the book. If this interpretation is accepted, anyone seeking a terminus ante quem to date this important manuscript will have to look further.

7 The al-Kallāsa (the ms writes al-Kannāsa) madrasa adjacent to the Umayyad Mosque was, at least from the 9th/14th century onwards the primary book market of Damascus and also the place where estates of books could be auctioned off.

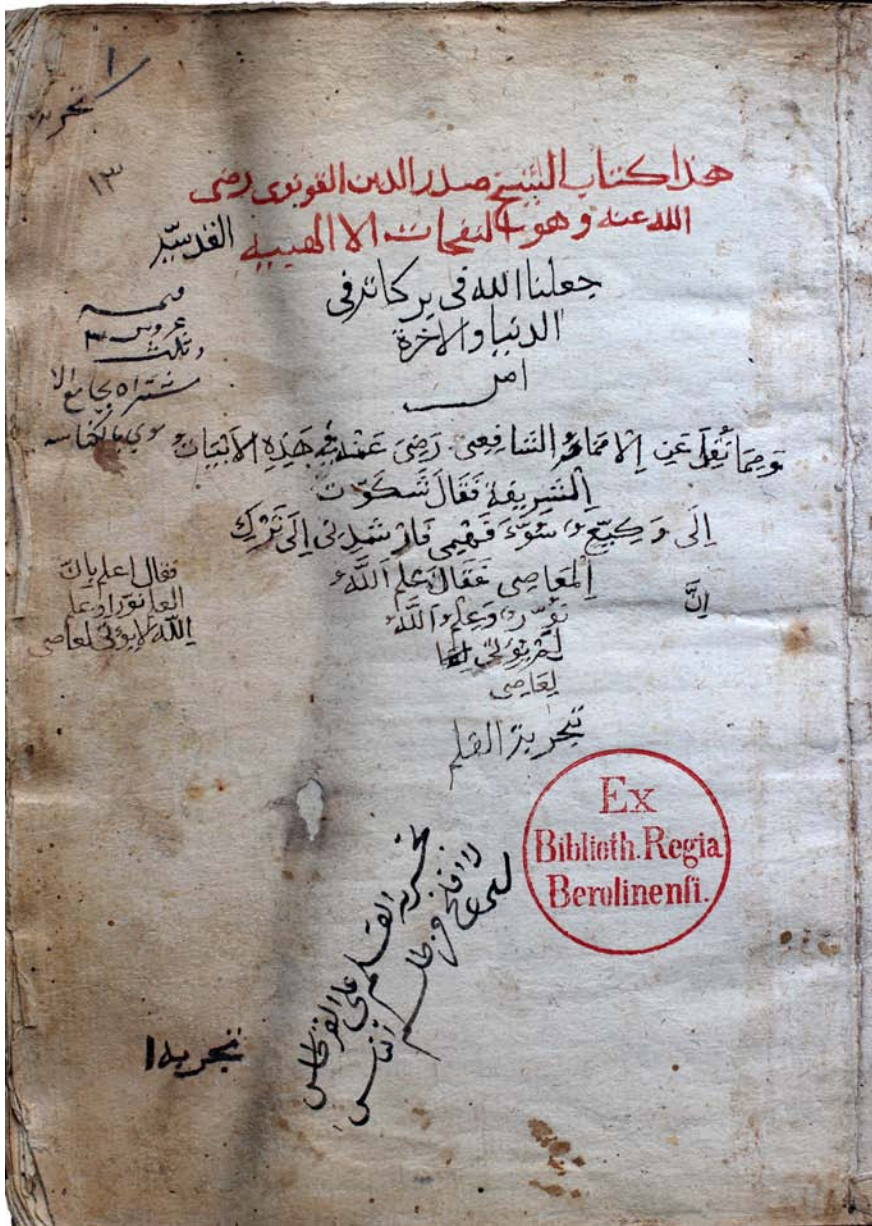


FIGURE 1 Title page al-Nafahāt al-ilāhiya al-qudsiya by Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī with the detail of a purchase note using the term mushtarāhu right after the price. Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Orientabteilung, MS Wetzstein II 1662, fol 1r.

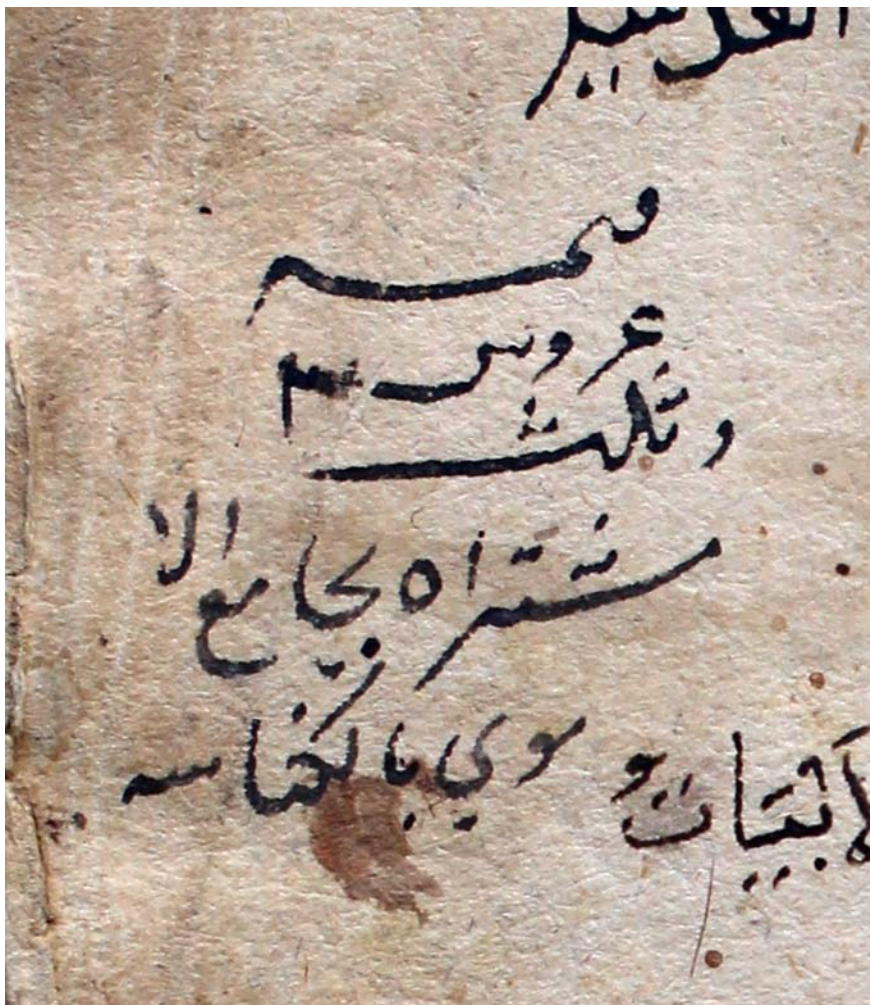


FIGURE 2 *Detail of the title page al-Nafahāt al-ilāhiya al-qudsiya by Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī using the term mushtarāhu right after the price. Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Orientabteilung, MS Wetzstein II 1662, fol 1r, detail.*

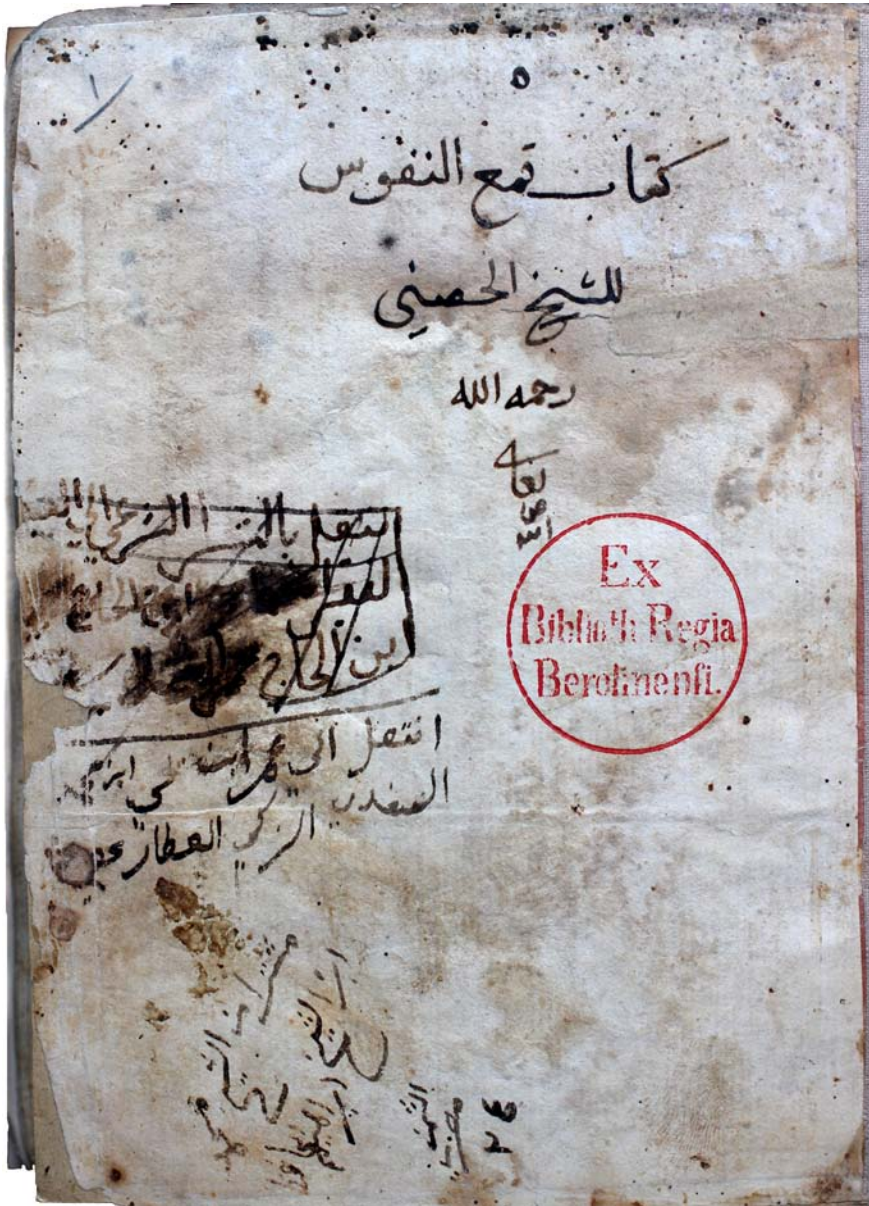


FIGURE 3 Title page of Taqī al-Dīn al-Ḥisrī's Qam' al-nufūs with the detail of a purchase note. The name of the seller is bracketed by the term mushtarā and a price. Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Orientabteilung, MS Wetzstein II 1877, fol. 1r.

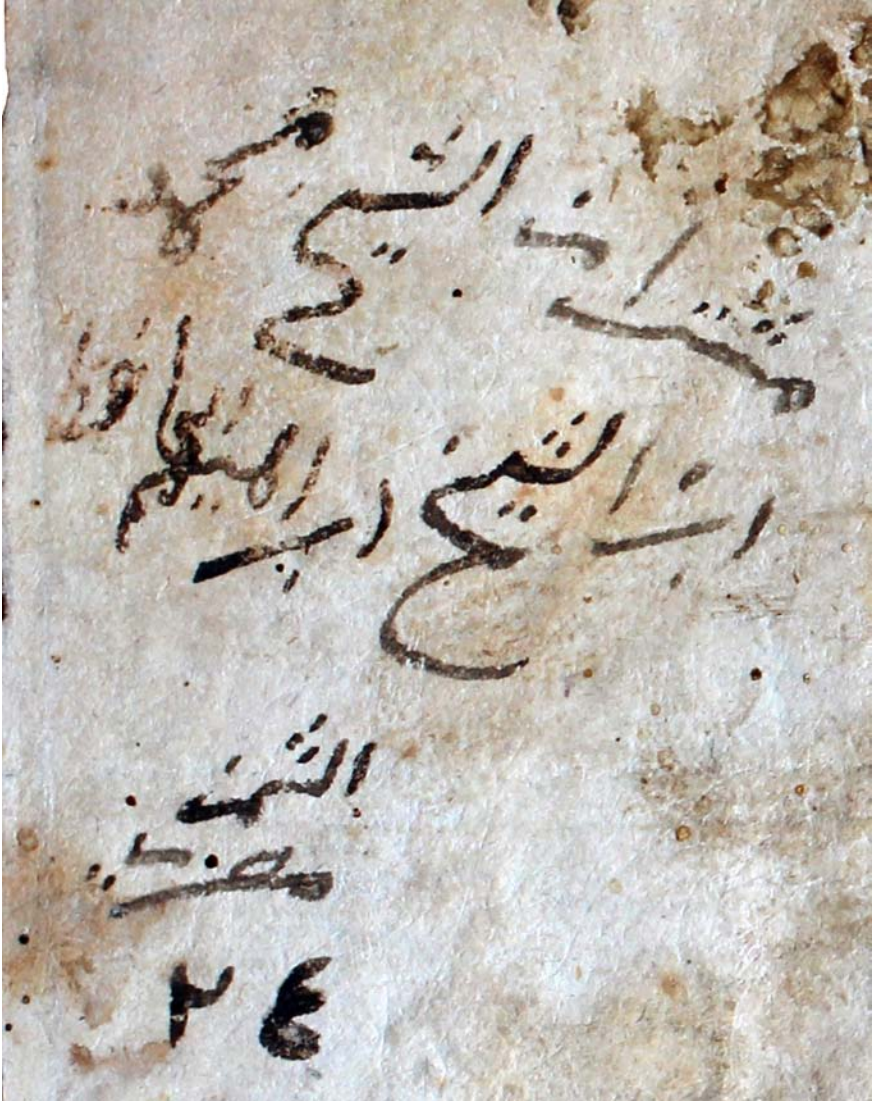


FIGURE 4 *Detail of the title page of Taqī al-Dīn al-Ḥiṣnī's Qam' al-nufūs. The name of the seller is bracketed by the term mushtarā and a price. Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Orientabteilung, ms Wetzstein II 1877, fol 1', detail.*