

# **STATUS REPORT ON MUNAZARA LITERATURE**

By

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY<sup>1</sup>

The Status Report on Munazara Literature presents two surveys: the Munazara Manuscripts Survey and the Printed Munazara Books Survey. The first, -an investigation into manuscripts extant in 10 Turkish library databases and a meta-database comprising 67 libraries,- identifies 354 original contributions to the Munazara tradition over the centuries. The average length of these contributions is 48 pages (*waraqā*). Including multiple copies of the same works, the total number of texts approximates 7000. The survey also offers diverse information depending on the availability of the data on the subject: These include the author's lifespan or year of death, the estimated number of copies in various libraries, and transliterations conforming to both Brill and Turkish standards. The second survey focuses on modern Arabic printed press cataloged mostly in Arab university library databases. Accordingly, we have identified 250 works, including 83 reprints from various publishers. In the 20th century, Munazara scholars al-Maydānī and al-Shankīfī dominate as reprinted 13 and 19 times respectively. The previous "post-classical" generations until the 19th century are represented by tens of Ṣaḡāqlizāda, al-Ījī, al-Samarqandī, and Adanawī editions. While it reveals a relative continuation of the study of Munazara, it also highlights the fact that hundreds of original contributions to Munazara await critical editions, let alone being translated into English.

This study makes two significant contributions to the understanding of Munazara literature. Primarily, it attempts the verification (*tahqīq*) of post-classical Islamic scholarship in a quantitative manner, thereby complementing previous work by Wisnowsky (2013) el-Rouayheb (2006; 2015), Pehlivan and Ceylam (2015), Çelik (2022) and Young (2022). However, by adopting a distant-reading approach (Moretti 2013) as opposed to the standard close-reading method, the Status Report aims to establish the groundwork for future quantitative and computational analyses of Munazara Literature. Accomplished through limited resources and significant labor, the Status Report enriches the emerging field of Munazara studies and its findings constitute the starting point for Abdussamed Koçak's research project "The Manuscripts of the Science of Debate in Turkish Libraries: Cataloging and Study". This project's findings will constitute the next iteration of the Status Report with corrected, extended material and information.

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## INTRODUCTION

Post-classical Islamic scholarship is largely based on chains of commentaries, glosses, and super-glosses. While new opposing voices are heard on this, the standard treatment of Islamic chains of textual work has been that they are replete with repetitions, unnecessary pedantry, and overall worthless to study (El-Rouayheb 2015; Wisnowsky 2013). However, El-Rouayheb showcases the evolutionary and revolutionary developments in the Munazara tradition over centuries. Similarly, building upon El-Rouayheb's seminal paper (2006) that has demonstrated the centrality of tahqīq in the Muslim scientific world, Wisnowsky adds, in the example of commentary tradition on Avicenna's *Ishārāt*, that these works had many functions all of which broadly constitute tahqīq (verification):

Examining the earliest commentaries on Avicenna's *Ishārāt* reveals a number of common concerns. Perhaps the most basic of these concerns was determining the proper role of the commentator. his was generally understood to consist in tahqīq, which means "verification" in its broadest sense. Even so, tahqīq could be construed as referring to a wide range of different functions. At one end of the spectrum of tahqīq was the commentator's subjecting the text to philological analysis, in order to authenticate that the text was genuinely by the author it was attributed to, and—more commonly—in order to verify that the manuscript witness at hand truly represented the original text that was composed by the author. At the other end of the spectrum of tahqīq was the commentator's subjecting the text to philosophical analysis, in order to test the validity of the theories and arguments presented by the author. (Wisnowsky 2013, 354)

In light of these observations, it becomes increasingly clear that studying the Munazara tradition through its manuscripts is not only necessary but crucial to our understanding of scholarship and its pedagogical dynamics. The post-classical Islamic practice of producing chains of commentaries, glosses, and super-glosses, despite criticisms, appears to have been a complex and multilayered academic tradition, entailing numerous functions under the broad umbrella of 'verification'. The worthless repetitions as some critics describe, are, in fact, intricate and nuanced layers of debate, analysis, and critique, adding dimensions to the original text. By overlooking or dismissing this rich tradition, we risk missing out on the evolutionary and revolutionary shifts within the Munazara tradition. Thus, this approach stands to offer valuable insights into the philosophical underpinnings, academic traditions, and intellectual transformations within the post-classical Islamic world.

The choice of location for our Munazara manuscript survey holds historical and cultural significance. The tradition of *Ādāb al-Baḥth wa al-Munāzara* thrived between the 14th and 19th centuries. Interestingly, from the 17th century onwards, Ottoman Empire emerged as the epicenter for *Munāzara* studies. This historical reality makes contemporary Turkey a particularly appropriate launchpad for a comprehensive survey of classical *Munāzara*

literature. In this region, various libraries have, to some extent, preserved unique copies of Munāzara literature.

One might naturally assume that our proximity to Turkey, with the ADAB project and its members primarily based in the country, would facilitate our research process. However, that hasn't been our experience. Despite promising developments in recent years, there is currently no comprehensive database for Turkish manuscripts. Existing catalogs are significantly limited and riddled with inaccuracies, adding an additional layer of complexity to our task. Furthermore, as we will demonstrate in the following sections, the Munazara tradition and scientific activity within the Muslim world were extensive, rendering our initial estimates significantly lower than reality.

There is an abundance of works on Munazara culminating over the centuries, many of which are yet to be explored and understood fully. This report merely attempts to outline this vast heritage or “big data” for future utilization. Section 1 of the paper presents the Munazara Manuscripts Survey with guiding remarks and a reflection on the encountered limitations. The section highlights the challenges of manuscript identification for various reasons. Section 2 presents the Printed Munazara Works Survey with 250 entries primarily cataloged in Arab university library databases, primarily in the Arab world. In Section 3 we offer a preliminary analysis of both surveys and we conclude with a discussion of future studies.

## **SECTION 1: MUNAZARA MANUSCRIPTS SURVEY**

For the Munazara Manuscripts Survey, we have conducted extensive research focusing on online libraries that have digitized, at least partially, the works contained in them<sup>2</sup>.

### **1.1. Data**

The list of libraries and collections studied for the data collection are

- Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality (İBB) Atatürk Library
- Ankara University Faculty of Theology Library
- Marmara University Library
- Atatürk University Library
- National Library
- Istanbul University Rare Books Library
- Presidency of Religious Affairs (DİB) Manuscript Library
- Istanbul Archaeological Museum Library
- Suna and İnan Kıraç Foundation Manuscript Collection
- Koç University Manuscript Collection

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<sup>2</sup> The manuscript identification has been conducted by Zafer Onur. Halima Bensaid has prepared the Excel document appendix, and Aysylu Saetgaraeva has searched for possible repetitions in the text as well as identifying the year of the author's death by mostly referring to Kahhala (1993).

- ISAM Library Database

1. Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality (İBB) Atatürk Library<sup>3</sup>

The library, which houses over 50,000 rare works such as stone prints, includes 9,467 manuscripts. The library is available online, and there are about 100 works related to Munazara.

2. Ankara University Faculty of Theology Library<sup>4</sup>

The library has a total of 2,269 manuscripts. It is accessible online and there are approximately 30 works related to Munazara.

3. Marmara University Library<sup>5</sup>

1,964 manuscripts and 6,781 works printed in old script are available online for researchers. There are approximately 100 works related to Munazara.

4. Atatürk University Library<sup>6</sup>

The library has 2,086 manuscripts and 42,000 rare works in different fields. There are about 60 works related to Munazara.

5. National Library<sup>7</sup>

Through the digital library, the bibliographies and digital images of many of the 28,115 volumes of manuscripts and 89,559 volumes of EHT (Old Lettered Turkish) printed books are available. The number of works related to Munazara, including repetitions, is between 1,000 and 2,000.

6. Istanbul University Rare Books Library<sup>8</sup>

Houses about 10,000 Arabic manuscripts, of which between 100 and 200 relate to the field of Munazara.

7. Presidency of Religious Affairs (DİB) Manuscript Library<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> <https://katalog.ibb.gov.tr/yordam/?p=0&dil=0>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.divinity.ankara.edu.tr/yazma-eserler/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://kutuphane.marmara.edu.tr/hizmetler/nadir-eserler-kutuphanesi>

<sup>6</sup> <https://bilgimerkezi.atauni.edu.tr/yordam/?p=0&dil=0>

<sup>7</sup> <https://dijital-kutuphane.mkutup.gov.tr/tr/manuscripts/catalog/list>

<sup>8</sup> <https://kutuphane.istanbul.edu.tr/tr/>

<sup>9</sup> <https://yazmaeserler.diyonet.gov.tr/>

The library contains 7,433 volumes related to Islamic civilization. The number of works related to Munazara, including repetitions, is between 1,000 and 1,500. The digital records of the rare works the library contains are available online.

8. Istanbul Archaeological Museum Library<sup>10</sup>

The library contains approximately 800 manuscripts, 15 of which relate to the field of Munazara.

9. Suna and İnan Kır aç Foundation Manuscript Collection<sup>11</sup>

The entire collection, which includes 626 volumes and 1,311 works, is open for access. The collection includes one manuscript related to Munazara.

10. Ko  University Manuscript Collection<sup>12</sup>

The collection provides an important resource for various studies and includes 340 volumes of manuscripts and about 8,000 rare works. There are 10 works related to Munazara. All works are accessible online.

11. ISAM Library Database<sup>13</sup>

ISAM Library, which uses the Ministry of Culture's database, has records of approximately 67 libraries affiliated with the Ministry of Culture. Among the databases we studied, ISAM presents unique opportunities and challenges. It provides catalog information for approximately 300,000 works. Of these, there are between 3,500 and 4,000 related to the field of Munazara, including repetitions. Some of the major libraries within this database are as follows: Suleymaniye Manuscript Library, Beyazıt Manuscript Library, Hacı Selim Aga Manuscript Library, and last but not least, Millet Manuscript Library. Although the library provides an extensive collection, most of these manuscripts are not digitally available, meaning that it was not possible to verify questions raised on the authenticity, authorship, and dating of these manuscripts. Nevertheless, we have included them in our list for future use and verification.

## 1.2. Guide to Munazara Manuscripts Survey

The Munazara Manuscripts Survey provides a comprehensive dataset that can significantly contribute to the study of Munazara. Here, we will delve into the details of each column, emphasizing their scholarly significance:

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<sup>10</sup> <https://kutuphane.ttk.gov.tr/>

<sup>11</sup> <https://katalog.iae.org.tr/yordam/?p=0&dil=0>

<sup>12</sup> <https://libdigitalcollections.ku.edu.tr/digital/collection/MC/search>

<sup>13</sup> <http://ktp.isam.org.tr/?url=makaleilh/findrecords.php>

*City/Library Collection*: This indicates the location where the manuscript is stored, giving scholars a reference point for accessing the physical document. It also provides historical and cultural context.

*Title (Original Text)*: This is the original title of the manuscript in its source language. Having the original text is crucial for accurate translations and interpretations.

*Title (Latinized English/BRILL)*: This Latinized version of the title can make it more accessible to scholars who may not be familiar with the source language.

*Author (Original Text)*: This shows the author's name in its original form. This is important for understanding the cultural and historical context of the work.

*Author (Latinized Turkish)* and *Author (Latinized English/BRILL)*: These Latinized versions of the author's name can help in correctly identifying and researching the author.

*Author Death Date (Gregorian)*: This provides valuable historical context, aiding scholars in understanding the time period in which the work was written.

*Manuscript Date (Hijri/Gregorian, Location)*: This indicates the estimated date and place of the manuscript's creation, providing a temporal and spatial context for the work.

*Manuscript Type (Original, Commentary, Gloss)*: The categorization of the manuscript type helps researchers understand the intention and function of the work.

*Library Reference*: This provides the specific reference needed to locate the manuscript within the library's collection.

*Number of Pages*: This offers an idea of the manuscript's length, which can be an important consideration in quantitative studies.

*Front Page Link and Backcover Link*: These provide direct digital access to the manuscript if available, facilitating remote research. This section is currently empty but the relevant data is collected.

*Language*: This gives the language of the manuscript, important for linguistic studies and translation efforts.

*Internal Copies*: This indicates whether there are other known copies of the same manuscript, which could be useful for comparison and verification of the text.

*Notes*: These could contain additional information about the manuscript, including peculiarities, discrepancies, or historical facts.

*Printed:* This indicates whether the manuscript has been printed as a lithograph, before the spread of modern printing, which could facilitate accessibility.

*Copyist:* This is the person who copied the manuscript from its original, which can be a crucial piece of information in the study of manuscript transmission and preservation. This column sometimes also the date and place where the copying took place.

*Condition:* This refers to the physical state of the manuscript, important for preservation, conservation, and digitization efforts.

This well-structured dataset not only aids in the process of cataloging and preserving these invaluable resources but also provides scholars and researchers with an understanding of each manuscript. It facilitates more research by providing essential contextual and technical information about the manuscript, albeit in baby steps. It is important to note that due to several limitations, we could not achieve our goal in an ideal form. Nevertheless, there is hope for future research.

### **1.3. Limitations**

The process of conducting research for the Manuscripts Survey was met with a range of limitations that gave us insights into the state of manuscript studies today. The first challenge stemmed from the lack of specialized catalogs specifically dedicated to this research area. The absence of a centralized repository meant that we had to individually scan each of the libraries. A dedicated catalog, curated meticulously for specific research areas<sup>14</sup>, can significantly enhance the efficiency of the research process. Nevertheless, the limitations we have encountered can be roughly grouped into three categories: 1) The lack of infrastructure, 2) the ambiguous nature of Munazara manuscripts, and relatedly 3) the lack of expertise from our side.

A significant issue we encountered was the limited digital accessibility of libraries, especially those not affiliated with universities, the Presidency of Religious Affairs, or the National Library. Due to this lack of comprehensive digital access, we faced difficulties in verifying some manuscripts. In addition, the quality of digital resources proved to be a mess. A number of online libraries had not photographed their manuscripts with enough clarity, and as the manuscripts themselves were damaged, resulting in difficulties in their interpretation. This particular issue was noticeable with the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality Library's digital resources. Last but certainly not least was the restriction of access to certain online libraries, particularly those affiliated with universities. These libraries often limit their online access to only their students or faculty. Finally, we grappled with technical difficulties in the digital environments of online libraries. Issues like slow loading times, freezing, and difficulties in

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<sup>14</sup> There seems to be an index that also catalogs Munazara tradition Zahrī (2011). This valuable study was identified, unfortunately, by the end of the Printed Munazara Books Survey research. As a result, we were unable to secure and utilize it. The work appears to have been reprinted twice in Morocco and another time in Syria in 2020. Further information is required to understand its scope and focus.



opening specific documents not only decelerated the pace of our research but made the process more arduous.

Previous paragraphs describe the inadequacies of infrastructure and the lack of reliability. These limitations were only doubled by our lack of knowledge of the Munazara tradition which requires decades of experience -an experience that has been limited to a handful of experts.

We will confine ourselves to a few examples. Most of the works written in the field bear strikingly similar titles, with exceptions like *Waladiyya* and *Taqrir al-Qavanin*. This similarity often leads to confusion. It seems many of the works written in this field begin with similar names:

- "Risāla fī Adab al-Baḥth"
- "Risāla fī Adab al-Baḥth wa-l Munāzara"
- "Risāla fī al-Munāzara"
- "Sharḥ 'alā Risāla Adab al-Baḥth"
- "Ḥāshiya 'alā Adab al-Baḥth"
- "Ḥāshiya 'alā Sharḥ Adab al-Baḥth"
- "Ḥāshiya 'alā Ḥāshiya 'alā Sharḥ Adab al-Baḥth"
- "Ḥāshiyat al-Ḥāshiya 'alā Adab al-Baḥth"
- "Manzūma fī Risāla fī Adab al-Baḥth"
- "Fawā'id fī Adab al-Baḥth"
- "Ṭalīqāt 'alā Risāla Adab al-Baḥth"

With such similar and often repetitive names, differentiating between various works becomes a substantial challenge.

The identification of authors also presented its share of obstacles, particularly due to the multiplicity of “nisbahs” (a term in Arabic indicating attribution or connection) an author might possess. Instances occurred where the same author was misinterpreted as multiple individuals due to the variation in nisbahs. For example, one library might record the author as Hamza Efendi, while other libraries catalog the same individual as Karahamza or Hamza Daredevī. In a similar vein, authors such as Muḥammad Efendi, Muḥammad al-Kurdī, Mollazada al-Kurdī, Muḥammad al-Suhrawī, and Muḥammad al-Suhrawī al-Kurdī, despite having been registered under different names, are in fact the same individual. The same issue applies to the scholar Mir Abū al-Fath and countless others. Furthermore, confusion also arises when multiple scholars bear the same nisbah. For instance, several authors with the 'Amīdī' attribution have composed works in this field, and the works are often recorded merely as "Sharḥ al-'Amīdī" or "Ḥāshiya al-'Amīdī". However, such works could potentially be by Muḥammad al-'Amīdī, 'Abd al-Wahhāb al-'Amīdī, or 'Umar al-'Amīdī, thereby increasing the complexity of identifying the correct author.

We will provide a brief discussion of the survey in the coming paragraphs. However, to do this, we will first introduce the Printed Munazara Works Survey.

## SECTION 2: PRINTED MUNAZARA WORKS SURVEY

The Printed Munazara Books Survey serves as a comprehensive database of Munazara literature, featuring both classical and contemporary works available in Arabic across databases primarily within the Arab world<sup>15</sup>. The Excel document, comprising 334 entries, is organized into five distinct columns: Title, Author, Publisher, Publication Place, and Publish Date. In several cases, the author's lifespan or year of death is also included.

The "Title" column catalogs the precise nomenclature of the works as they are documented in the original source databases. This classification ensures accurate citation as well as provides insights into the subject matter of the work.

The *Author* column houses the names of the contributing scholars to the Munazara tradition. The inclusion of lifespan or year of death data further enhances the historical context, offering a timeline for tracking the evolution of Munazara.

In the *Publisher*, we enumerate the organizations responsible for the circulation of these works. This provides a broader view of the institutions endorsing and promoting Munazara scholarship.

The *Publication Place* column illustrates the geographical spread of Munazara literature, offering an understanding of the tradition's regional significance.

Finally, the *Publication Date* column allows for the observation of temporal trends in Munazara scholarship, reflecting shifts in focus over time.

Thus, the Printed Munazara Books Survey, with its distant reading, lays the groundwork for understanding the trajectory of Munazara literature in terms of its development, geographical spread, and ongoing contribution.

## SECTION 3: PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS

The Status Report on Munazara Literature, encompassing both the Munazara Manuscripts Survey and the Printed Munazara Books Survey, offers insights into the historical trajectory, geographical distribution, and genre diversity of the Munāzara tradition.

The Munzara Manuscripts Survey, drawing from 10 Turkish library databases and a meta-database of 67 libraries, identifies 354 original contributions to the Munazara tradition, representing a plethora of scholars spanning several centuries. The average length of these contributions stands at 48 pages (*waraq*). When counting multiple copies of the same works,

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<sup>15</sup> The Printed Munazara Works Survey utilizes several databases including the Arabic Union Catalog (الفهرس العربي), al-Maktabah al-Shāmilah (المكتبة الشاملة) database. In addition to these, the survey also utilizes *Geschichte des arabischen Schrifttums* (GAS) by Fuat Sezgin (2023) as its fource source. The research for the survey has been conducted by Alaeddin Eyüpoğlu.

the number of texts rises to around 7000. In terms of genres, the surveys reveal an interesting distribution: there are 89 original works, mostly epistles, 141 glosses, and 124 commentaries. Other genres include translations, summaries, and prose writing, indicating the rich textual diversity within the tradition. The diversity of data presented in the survey, such as authors' lifespans or years of death, estimated number of copies available in various libraries, and transliterations in accordance with Brill and Turkish standards, provides a ground for an array of in-depth studies.

The Printed Munāzara Books Survey takes a different approach, concentrating on modern Arabic printed press indexed mostly in Arab university library databases. This survey yields a total of 250 works, including 83 reprints. In the 20th century, Munāzara scholars al-Maydānī and al-Shankīṭī are particularly notable, with their works reprinted 13 and 19 times respectively. Pre-20th century contributions, extending back to the 19th century, are represented by substantial editions from Ṣac'āqlizāda, al-'Ijī, al-Samarqandī, and 'Adanawī. A noteworthy outcome of this survey is the identification of hundreds of original contributions to Munāzara literature, awaiting critical editions and translations into English.

The two surveys can be used together or independently for multiple purposes. For instance, the Printed Munazara Books Survey reveals geographical hotspots for Munāzara literature printing, notably Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Syria. This information, when used alongside the Manuscripts Survey, can offer insights into historical printing and publishing practices, regional influences on the tradition, and potential centers of future research.

## CONCLUSION

The Status Report on Munazara Literature aims to provide a foundational platform for future studies in the field. However, it is crucial to remember the humble beginnings of this endeavor, and the limited human and financial resources available for its execution. Thus, despite the considerable progress made, the report necessarily remains a work in progress and reflects certain limitations that come with its modest resources. The present study lays the groundwork for future research and sets the stage for further engagement with the literature. Abdussamed Koçak, in collaboration with the authors of this study, is currently in the process of reviewing and revising the Munazara Manuscripts Survey. This iterative process is expected to yield more accurate and significant insights, paving the way for future editions of the status report that promises to be more comprehensive and illuminating.

Several trajectories for future work emerge from this study. First, the complete digitalization of the Munazara manuscripts and printed works is paramount. This would not only increase the accessibility of these texts but also ensure their preservation. Second, the creation of an online library dedicated to Munazara texts, both in their original language and translated forms, could serve as a valuable resource for scholars and students alike.

The vast corpus of Munazara texts lends itself to the application of digital humanities approaches. With advancements in manuscript recognition technologies, the thousands of

Munazara manuscripts and printed books could effectively be transformed into a *big data* set. This data could then be harnessed to yield macro-level, *distant-reading* insights into the Munazara tradition, opening up new avenues of research. Lastly, the translation of Munazara texts into English remains a largely unexplored area. The endeavor not only helps to bridge linguistic barriers but also serves to extend the reach of Munazara literature to a wider global audience. An international book series dedicated to Munazara translations and academic monographs focusing on the theory and practice of Munazara are extremely necessary for the contemporary development of the field.

The Status Report on Munazara Literature represents the initial steps towards systematic, comprehensive research in the field. While much work remains to be done, the study has set the course toward realizing these future possibilities. The field of Munazara literature is ripe for exploration, and this study serves as an invitation for scholars to join the journey.

## **APPENDIX**

Contains the links to the [Munazara Manuscripts Survey](#) and the [Printed Munazara Works Survey](#).

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