B. Papers

Into the Deep Past of the Ottoman Istanbul: The Bronze Horseman of Constantine in Sixteenth-Century ʿAcāʾibs

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Exploration of a vast geography and a deep past awaits the readers of Ottoman cosmographical encyclopedias. Generically entitled *ʿAcāʾibü'l-maḫlūḳāt ve Ġarāʾib al-mevcūdāt* (Wonders of creation and oddities of existence; *ʿAcāʾib*, from now on), these works are attempts to present the wonders of the cosmos in

1 This paper is based on research carried out under the project "GHOST: Geographies and Histories of the Ottoman Supernatural Tradition: Exploring Magic, the Marvelous, and the Strange in Ottoman Mentalities," funded by the European Research Council Consolidator Grant Scheme (CoGr2017 No. 771766). I am grateful to all members of the Ghost team with special thanks to Feray Çoşkun for invaluable feedback for my on-going project. I would like to thank Güneş Işıksel, Melis Taner, Marinos Sariyannis and my father Erhan Altunel for their wonderful feedback on the first draft. And many thanks to Elana Boeck for her book on the bronze horseman of Justinian, without which this article could not have been written.

Note on the transliteration: In the passages cited from published editions, the authors' conventions, even when very different from each other, were followed to be faithful to the edition.

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a single volume.[2] As explained by one writer, they offer tours around the globe "so that there will be no need to travel the world in this short life, during such seditious times."[3] In addition to distant lands, the writers of *ʿAcā'ibs* guide their readers to distant pasts and urge contemplation on ancient civilizations. When describing the ruins of Baalbek, a writer asks, for example, "Now, when did they do it? How did they bring so many stones? What kind of a people were they? How could they be this strong"?[4]

This article follows these sixteenth-century Ottoman Turkish cosmographers in their exploration of the deep past of early modern Istanbul. Although *ʿAcā'ib* writers included information regarding Istanbul's contemporaneous Ottoman monuments, such additions did not challenge the dominance of the city's ancient past. On the contrary, the authors in question were especially interested in late antique statues and columns. Istanbul is a city of ancient statuary in their works and this article explores why. We begin with an examination of Ottoman interest in antiquities and how Ottoman ʿAcā'ib writers continued to transmit medieval Arabic stories about Byzantine statuary in their Istanbul entries. While the previous scholarship dismissed Ottoman ʿAcā'ibs as highly repetitive, in this article I aim to show how each ʿAcā'ib has its own unique way of depicting Istanbul. After identifying these differences through three examples, I focus on a major landmark which all the ʿAcā'ibs fixated on.

Among all of Istanbul's Byzantine monuments, a colossal sculpture of a bronze horse and its rider elevated by Justinian (r. 527–65) on a column in front of Hagia Sophia was the most significant for *ʿAcā'ib* writers. Arguably one of

2 See F. Coşkun, "Working paper: *ʿAcā'ib wa Garā'ib* in the early Ottoman cosmographies", *Aca'ib, Occasional Papers on the Ottoman Perceptions of the Supernatural*, 1 (2020), 85–105; idem, "Osmanlı Coğrafya Literatürü ve Acâibü'l-Mahlûkât Janrı", *TALID*, 33.17 (2019), 269–286; M. Sariyannis, *Perceptions Ottomanes du Surnaturel, Aspects de l'histoire intellectuelle d'une culture islamique à l'époque modern*, (Paris 2019), 21–39; idem, "Ajā'ib ve gharā'ib: Ottoman Collections of Mirabilia and Perception of the Supernatural", *Der Islam*, 92.2 (2015), 442–467; G. Kut, "Türk Edebiyatında Acâibü'l-mahlûkât Tercümeleri Üzerine", *Beşinci Milletler Arası Türkoloji Kongresi, Tebliğler: Türk Edebiyatı*, vol.1, (Istanbul 1985), 185–193.

3 *Dürr-i Meknûn* (İnceleme-Çeviriyazı-Dizin-Tıpkıbasım), ed. A. Demirtaş (Istanbul 2009), 89; "bu azacıḳ ʿömr içinde fitne zamānında cihānı geşt idüp görmeğe iḥtiyāç olmaya."

4 *Tercüme-i Acâ'ibü'l-Mahlûkât ve Garâ'ibü'l-Mevcûdât*, ed. B. Sarıkaya (Istanbul 2019), 223; "İmdi bunı ne zamānda ėtdiler ola? Buncılayın ṭaşları nice getürmiş olalar? Ve bular ne ḳavm-idi, ne ḳuvvetleri var-ımış?"

Fig. 1 The bronze horseman between Hagia Sophia and the obelisk of Theodosius, *Tercüme-i Cifrü'l-Cāmī*, İUK TY6624, fol. 92v, early seventeenth-century manuscript, Photo courtesy of Istanbul University Library

the largest metal equestrian sculptures anywhere, it stood atop the tallest free-standing column of the premodern world for almost a millennium.[5] It was removed by Mehmed II (r. 1444–46 and 1451–81) sometime after the conquest, was reportedly seen by a European antiquarian on the palace grounds, and was possibly melted down by the 1550s.[6] Regardless, it continued to attract interest even a century after its destruction, in an early seventeenth-century depiction of the Hippodrome (Fig.1). It was also included in the *ʿAcāʾibs* and presented as

5 E. N. Boeck, *The Bronze Horseman of Justinian in Constantinople: The Cross-Cultural Biography of a Mediterranean Monumen*t (Cambridge 2021).

6 On the removal of the sculpture, see J. Raby, "Mehmed the Conqueror and the Equestrian Statue of the Augustaion", *Illinois Classical Studies*, 12.2 (1987), 305–313 and Boeck, *The Bronze Horseman of Justinian in Constantinople*, 317–334.

an embodiment of preternatural forces and an admonishment for the futility of this-worldly pursuits. Through the example of the bronze horseman in the *ʿAcā'ibs*, I aim to illustrate how the ancient monuments of sixteenth-century Istanbul were not the insignificant remains of a remote past, as is often assumed, but rather, they contained enduring messages for their Ottoman audiences.

Why study stories about Istanbul's talismanic antiquities in Ottoman ʿAcā'ibs?

In this paper, my aims are three-fold. My first goal is to introduce an exciting corpus as a source for the history of Ottoman Istanbul. The sixteenth century, when the majority of Ottoman *ʿAcā'ibs* were composed, was a time of intense building and writing activity in Istanbul; Monumental mosque-complexes arose in the growing skyline and were discussed by numerous poets, scholars, and historians of diverse genres.[7] Sixteenth-century Ottoman *ʿAcā'ib* writers, as we will see, contributed to this literature, but unlike most of their contemporaries they were also interested in Istanbul's ancient statuary. Thus, Ottoman *ʿAcā'ibs* provide us with a distinct source material as well as a different perspective with which to look at the sixteenth-century Istanbul.

My second goal, which relies on the realisation of the first, is to better understand how Ottomans engaged with Istanbul's antiquities. The conventional way of thinking about Istanbul's rich and long history involves thinking about the layers which constitute the city: Pagan Roman, Christian Byzantine, Muslim Ottoman, Turkish Republican and so on. Each layer is often perceived as separate from the next and assumed to be unintelligible or uninteresting to those who built atop it. Following Byzantinists who have challenged this conventional view and offered exciting studies of the afterlives of ancient monuments during the long period of Byzantine history, a pioneering group of Ottomanists have questioned the assumption of a cultural rupture between Byzantine and Ottoman pasts of Istanbul.[8] Moreover, new research on early modern Ottoman

7 For the representation of Istanbul in sixteenth-century Ottoman literary and geographical works, see H. Aynur, "Şehri Sözle Resmetmek: Osmanlı Edebî Metinlerinde İstanbul", in H. Aynur (ed. et al.), *Antik Çağ'dan XXI. Yüzyıla Büyük İstanbul Tarihi* (Istanbul 2015), vol. 7, 128–145 and P. Emiralioğlu, *Geographical Knowledge and Imperial Culture in the Early Modern Ottoman Empire* (Farnham and Burlington 2014), 76–88.

8 For works of pioneering Ottomanists on the afterlife of Byzantine monuments in Ottoman Istanbul, see for example, S. Yerasimos, *Légendes d'empire: La fondation de Constantinople*

writing about the antiquities of Athens, Alexandria, and Baalbek began to explore why the ancient past mattered to Ottomans.[9] In-depth study of Ottoman *ʿAcā'ibs,* as I hope to demonstrate, have much to offer this body of research.

And my final goal is to listen to the stories about Istanbul's antiquities from a diverse body of writers whose voices are not easily heard. Our knowledge about Ottoman *ʿAcā'ib* writers is meagre. Many remain anonymous. However, those who did sign their works are an interesting of group of experts from various corners of the empire. They include, for example, a timekeeper of an imperial mosque in Istanbul, a retired scribe at Damascus, or a Quran reciter in Bosnia. While they composed their texts with the patronage of the ruling elite in mind, they also wanted their whole communities to benefit from their works. Some managed to reach the broad readership they desired. Numerous *ʿAcā'ib* copies circulated in different parts of the empire and can be found in diverse types of library collections at palaces, Sufi lodges, and the medreses. Thus, by studying Istanbul entries in the *ʿAcā'ibs*, we can observe the knowledge of ancient monuments which were presented by diverse writers and circulated among wide reading publics.

To date, scholarship on the *ʿAcā'ibs* has explored intriguing examples of the corpus, which spread across vast geographies, languages, and periods of the Islamic world from the twelfth century onwards.[10] In the case of Ottoman

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et de Sainte-Sophie dans les traditions turque (Paris 1990) and Ç. Kafescioğlu, *Constantinopolis/Istanbul: Cultural Encounter, Imperial Vision, and the Construction of the Ottoman Capital* (University Park, PA 2009).

9 For recent approaches to the study of Eastern Mediterranean cities and their ancient past, see contributions in E. Fowden (ed. et al.), *Cities as Palimpsests? Responses to Antiquity in Eastern Mediterranean Urbanism* (Oxford and Philadelphia 2022). For inspiring studies of early modern Ottoman interest in the ancient histories of Alexandria, Athens and Baalbek, G. Casale, "Time and the Other: Ottoman Encounters with Egypt's Ancient Past", in A. Abu-Husayn, (ed.), *1516: The Year that Changed the Middle East and the World* (Beirut 2022), 150–175; E. Fowden, "The Parthenon Mosque, King Solomon and the Greek Sages" and G. Tunalı, "An 18th-century Take on Ancient Greece: Mahmud Efendi and the Creation of the Tarih-i Medinetu'l-Hukema", in M. Georgopoulou and K. Thanasakis (eds), *Ottoman Athens: Archeology, Topography, History,* (Athens 2019), 67–95 and 97–121; E. Fowden, "The Parthenon, Pericles and King Solomon: a case study of Ottoman archaeological imagination in Greece", *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies*, 42 (2018), 261–274; N. Shafir, "Nābulisi explores the Ruins of Baalbek: Antiquarianism in the Ottoman Empire the Seventeenth century", *Renaissance Quarterly,* 75 (2022), 136–84.

10 The literature on the long tradition of *ʿAcā'ibs* in Arabic, Persian, and Ottoman is vast. See,

Turkish studies, however, while many of the surviving manuscripts have been catalogued, and some critical editions and art historical studies on selected illustrated manuscripts have been published, the work is still in its beginnings, and analyses of the texts are rare.[11] This neglect is due in part to the difficulty of understanding the complex world-view which *ʿAcāʾib* writers offer to their pre-modern readers. *ʿAcāʾib* writers entreat their readers to observe the world relying not only their physical senses but also though "the eye of discernment" to contemplate divine order. [12] Their work combines fact and fiction, history and legend, real and the imagined. As Pancaroğlu shows in a pioneering study of a thirteenth century Persian work, the depiction of statues serves to convey not only visual data but also to render the reader cognizant of the ominous signs hidden from the eye.[13] This chapter aims to explore what Ottoman *ʿAcāʾib* writers wanted to show their readers about Istanbul's ancient past.

Ottoman Istanbul: A City of Ancient Statuary

Ottoman *ʿAcāʾibs* invite their readers to a city of ancient statues and columns. Following earlier Arabic and Persian works, entries about Istanbul in the Ottoman *ʿAcāʾibs* begin with the depiction of the city gates decorated with sculptures and proceed to the monuments displayed at major public squares, such

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for example, P. Berlekamp, *Wonder, Image, and Cosmos in Medieval Islam* (New Haven 2011); S. von Hees, "The Astonishing: a critique and re-reading of 'Aǧā' ib literature", *Middle Eastern Literatures,* 8.2 (2005), 101–120; T. Zadeh, "The Wiles of Creation: Philosophy, Fiction, and the *ʿAjāʾib* tradition", *Middle Eastern Literatures*, 13.1 (2010), 21–48; V. Gupta, "Wonder Reoriented: Manuscripts and Experience in Islamicate Society of South Asia (ca. 1450–1600)", unpublished DPhil dissertation, School of Oriental and Asian Studies, 2020.

11 In addition to the scholarship cited in Footnote 2, see the excellent catalogue E. İhsanoğlu (ed. et al.), *Osmanlı Coğrafya Literatürü Tarihi (History of Geographical Literature During the Ottoman Period)* (Istanbul 2000); and for art historical studies, see K. Rührdanz, "An Ottoman Illustrated Version of al-Ṭūsī's *ʿAjāʾib al-Makhlūqāt*", in A. Temimi (ed. et al.), *Mélanges Prof. Machiel Kiel,* (Zaghouan 1999), 455–75 and R. Milstein and B. Moor, "Wonders of a Changing world: Late Illustrated *ʿAjaʾib* manuscripts (Part I)", *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam*, 32 (2006), 1–48.

12 For contemplating wonders and the capacity of by-gone civilization to induce wonder, see Çoşkun, "Working Paper", 94–95 and 101–102. For the "eye of discernment", see G. Necipoğlu, "The Scrutinizing Gaze in the Aesthetics of Islamic Visual Cultures: Sight, Insight, and Desire", *Muqarnas*, 32 (2015), 23–61.

13 O. Pancaroğlu, "Signs in the Horizons: Concepts of Image and Boundary in a Medieval Persian Cosmography", *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics,* 43 (2003), 31–41.

as the bronze horseman, the serpent column, the Egyptian obelisk, and the columns of Arcadius and Constantine. Although information about Istanbul's contemporaneous Ottoman architecture is also included, the focus is on the antiquities. This focus is perhaps not surprising. Late antique Constantinople was once a unique showcase for statuary and praised as such in medieval Islamic geographical literature for centuries. To build his new capital, Constantine (r.306–337) carried out one of the most extensive decorative campaigns in history: he adorned Istanbul with hundreds of sculptures brought from 23 cities around the Roman empire.[14] The collection grew in the following centuries with newly-erected colossal monuments. While Theodosius I (r. 379–395) erected a twenty-meters-high two-thousand-year-old obelisk almost at the Hippodrome, Justinian (r. 527–65) placed an immense bronze horseman in front of Hagia Sophia. Medieval Arab and Persian geographers, like many other travelers of the time, were impressed by this display and transmitted stories about Istanbul's statuary across the Islamic Mediterranean for centuries. [15] By the time Ottomans conquered Constantinople, many of the statues and columns had been burnt down, fallen after earthquakes, or plundered during the Fourth Crusade. Still, several remarkable examples remained standing in the 1450s and a persistent written tradition about them had survived through Arabic ʿAcāʾibs. Thus, the Ottomans inherited both a city of ancient statuary as well as a rich tradition of writing about them.

Ottoman *ʿAcāʾib* writers were committed to transmitting medieval Arabic stories about late antique Byzantine monuments almost verbatim. As Taeschner demonstrated almost a century ago, the entry of Istanbul in one of the earliest surviving Ottoman Turkish *ʿAcāʾibs* by a fourteenth-century writer from Edirne is almost identical to the entries of Istanbul in earlier Arabic *ʿAcāʾibs*.[16] Since the publication of Taeschner's article in 1929, there has not been another attempt to study how Ottoman *ʿAcāʾib* writers portrayed Istanbul and whether this depiction changed after the conquest. Ottoman *ʿAcāʾibs* were overlooked as mere

14 S. Bassett, *The Urban Image of Late Antique Constantinople* (Cambridge 2004) and P. Chatterjee, *Between the Pagan Past and Christian Present in Byzantine Visual Culture, Statues in Constantinople, 4th-13th Centuries CE* (Cambridge 2021).

15 N. El Cheikh, *Byzantium Viewed by the Arabs* (Cambridge 2004), 139–52.

16 F. Taeschner, "Der Bericht des arabischen Geographen Ibn al-Wardi über Konstantinopel", in H. Mžik (ed.), *Beiträge zur historischen Geographie, Kulturgeographie, Ethnograhie und Kartographie, vornemlich des Orients* (Leipzig and Vienna 1929), 85–91.

repetitions of earlier sources. A closer look through a diachronic perspective, however, reveals significant dynamism and difference, as well as remarkable continuities.

When we compare two of the earliest surviving Ottoman *ʿAcā'ibs,* for example, we are able to discern two distinct approaches to Istanbul's antiquities. For the fourteenth-century *ʿAcā'ib* writer Ali b. Abdurrahman, Istanbul is an enchanted city of antiquities adorned with exceptional beauty and occult power.[17] The anonymous writer of a fifteenth-century Ottoman Turkish *ʿAcā'ib*, however, opposes the depiction of such a beautifully decorated city. Translating from the Persian *ʿAcā'ib* of Tusi (d. sometime after 1196), the anonymous writer cites the hadith report of Ka'b al-Ahbar (d. 652 or 654) according to which "the Constantinople shall be destroyed to such an extent that not a rooster will crow. The earth will move. Three fires will come out; one from pitch, one from naphtha, and one from sulfur. They will burn the city with its people. Their cries will reach the skies."[18] Although a brief note states that "there are many wonders there; among them is the lack of snakes," no wonder is depicted. Rather than a site for amazing sculptures of Ali b. Abdurrahman, this *ʿAcā'ib* writer's Istanbul is a city to be consumed by great fires. The difference between the two earliest surviving Ottoman *ʿAcā'ibs* is striking. It is also remarkable that the later Ottoman *ʿAcā'ib* writers, who wrote after the Ottoman conquest, did not draw on Tusi at all.[19] As the following three examples will show, for all sixteenth-century *ʿAcā'ib* writers whether they were the timekeeper of a mosque, Qur'an reciter, or retired bureaucrat, Istanbul was a city of ancient statues and columns. Rather than the impending doom, they celebrated enduring statues and columns.

17 Ibid.

18 *Tercüme-i Acâ'ibü'l-Mahlûkât ve Garâ'ibü'l-Mevcûdât*, ed. B. Sarıkaya, 258; "Allāhu Taʿālā aña vaʿde ėtdi ki anı şöyle ḫarāb ėde ki ḫurūs daḫı bañlamaya ve yėr ḫareket ėde. Üç od peydā ola: biri zifit ve biri nefṭ ve biri kibrįt. Daḫı şehri ḳavmi-y-ile yaḳa. Anlaruñ feryādı 'inān-ı semāya ėrişe". I am yet to identify this report. Although Ka'b al-Ahbar has a well-known report about the conquest of Constantinople it is not the report here. For traditions which link the conquest of Constantinople with the last hour, see El-Cheikh, *Byzantium Viewed by the Arabs*, 66–71.

19 Tusi's work, as far as we know, was translated only once and survived in three known copies.

Ancient Statues of a Muslim City

Mustafa b. Ali (d.1571), the timekeeper of Sultan Selim Mosque in Istanbul, is one of the first writers who included information about contemporaneous Istanbul's Muslim life in an Ottoman *ʿAcāʾib,* i.e. his *Tuḥfetü'z-Zamān* (*Gift of Time*, c. 1526).[20] In his introduction, he argues that every new thing has a taste and presents his project as the product of a new rule (*ḳāʿide-yi cedīde*), which he had applied to the (old) information gathered from respectable books.[21] The *Tuḥfe's* Istanbul entry follows this rule; it is a combination of the new and the old. It begins with depictions of pre-Ottoman monuments based on earlier *ʿAcāʾibs* and ends with the contemporaneous Muslim life with the author's calculation of prayer times.

Like all earlier Arabic *ʿAcāʾib* writers, Mustafa b. Ali opens his entry with a depiction of ancient gates, columns, and sculptures, which he describes as wonders with significant messages and exceptional powers.[22] For example, he writes how a sculpture of a bronze horseman on top of a monumental column, as we will see in detail later, presents both a moral lesson and talismanic protection. After this section on antiquities, he presents a thriving Muslim town. "This city's food, fruits, fountains, mosques, masjids and markets are abundant," he writes, "May its blessing be multiplied."[23] He then draws on his expertise as a timekeeper and includes detailed information on prayer times and Istanbul's geographical location vis-a-vis Mecca.[24] Thus, his Istanbul entry threads together the depictions of ancient statues from earlier *ʿAcāʾibs* with information about Istanbul's new place within the Muslim world.

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20 The work was presented to Sultan Süleyman. For the *Tuḥfe,* see Ş. İstanbullu, "Osmanlılar'da Coğrafta Bilimi ve Mustafa b. Ali'nin *Tuhfetü'z-Zaman ve Haridetü'l-Evan* Adlı Eseri (Transkripsiyon)", unpublished MA thesis, Karabük University, 2019. See also Mustafa b. Ali, *Tuḥfetü'z-Zamān,* Nuruosmaniye 2993.

21 *Tuhfetü'z-Zaman*, ed. İstanbullu, 50. See also Mustafa b. Ali, *Tuḥfetü'z-Zamān,* fol. 5b.

22 *Tuhfetü'z-Zaman*,"ed. İstanbullu, 217–18. See also Mustafa b. Ali, *Tuḥfetü'z-Zamān,* fol. 196b-197b.

23 *Tuhfetü'z-Zaman,* ed. İstanbullu, 217. See also Mustafa b. Ali, *Tuḥfetü'z-Zamān,* fol. 196b-197b; "Bu şehrin etimesi [sic. at'ime] ve meyvesi ve çeşmeleri ve şimdi camileri ve mescitleri ve pazarları ziyadedir. Dahi ziyadeler müyesser ola."

24 *Tuhfetü'z-Zaman*, ed. İstanbullu, 217–18, See also Mustafa b. Ali, *Tuḥfetü'z-Zamān,* fol. 197b-198b. For this section, he uses a treatise he composed a year before the *Tuḥfe* on the coordinates of one hundred cities in the Northern Hemisphere and their distance from Istanbul. See Emiralioğlu, *Geographical Knowledge*, 80–82.

A city as it was, rather than as it is

In addition to the writers such as Mustafa b. Ali, who shaped Istanbul entries according to their particular interests, there were also those who did not make any changes and presented Istanbul only as a city of ancient statuary. In 1563, Mahmud al-Hatib, a Qur'an reciter, presented one such *'Acā'ib* to a recently appointed governor of Bosnia.[25] This was a translation of the early fifteenth-century Arabic work entitled the *Kharīdat al-'Ajā'ib wa Farīdat al-Gharā'ib* (Pearls of Wonders and the Uniqueness of Strange Things). Although Mahmud el-Hatib does not disclose his reasons for translating this particular *'Acā'ib*, the *Kharīdat*'s warm reception among sixteenth-century Ottoman learned circles might have made it a suitable gift for a young governor.[26] Like its original Arabic, the translation was well-received, and reached beyond the governor's court. Circulating first in neighboring Southeast European towns such as Novi Pazar and Plovdiv, it then moved to various other cities of the empire such as Konya and Cairo.[27]

Mahmud el-Hatib's Istanbul entry is a verbatim translation of the *Kharīdat*. Since the Arabic work was written before the Ottoman conquest, it did not feature descriptions of Ottoman architecture or Muslim life. Significantly, Mahmud el-Hatib did not include any information about the changes in Istanbul's urban life since 1453. In other parts of his work, as Feray Çoşkun and Sema Yaniç have demonstrated, he was keen on "updating" the *Kharīdat*. For example, he included his observations of early sixteenth-century Ottoman restorations in the Holy Lands and eye-witness accounts of fellow Ottoman scholars about a "dragon" seen in Macedonia.[28] Yet, he did not include even a

25 F. Çoşkun, "An Ottoman Preacher's Perception of a Medieval Cosmography: Maḥmud el-Haṭīb's Translation of Kharīdat al-'Ajā'ib wa Farīdat al-Gharā'ib", *Al-Masaq: Islam and Mediterranean*, 23.1 (2011), 53–66 and idem, "A Medieval Cosmography in Ottoman Context: Maḥmud el-Haṭīb's Translation of Kharīdat al-'Ajā'ib", unpublished MA thesis, Boğaziçi University, 2007. See also the critical edition by S. Yaniç, "Hace Hatib Mahmud er-Rumi ve Haridetü'l 'Acayib ve Feridetü'l- Garayib Tercümesi İsimli Eserinin Edisyon Kritik ve Tahlili", unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Selçuk University, 2004 and idem, "Hâce Hatib Mahmud Er-Rûmî, Eserleri ve Osmanlı İlim Hayatındaki Yeri", *Türkiyat Araştırmaları Dergisi*, 16 (2004), 411–23.

26 It was recommended for "the edification of the soul" in a renowned encyclopedia of the time. Çoşkun, "A Medieval Cosmography in Ottoman Context", 83.

27 Ibid., 148–52.

28 Ibid., 88–90, 93–97 and 133.

sentence to share his own views about the contemporary state of the capital. Perhaps because he lived in Bosnia and wrote mainly for the audience there, he did not find it necessary to include Istanbul's Ottoman present. In this word-by-word translation, his Istanbul is only a city of ancient monuments without any mention of its contemporaneous Ottoman life.

Old ʿAcā'ibs and New Histories

Lengthy depictions of mosque-complexes, imperial buildings, and pleasure grounds of Ottoman Istanbul appear among the city's ancient monuments in Mehmed Aşık's *Menāzırü'l-ʿavālim* (Perspectives of the Worlds), (c. 1598).[29] Mehmed Aşık explained his reasons for composing the *Menāzır* as not to forget what he had learned during his long career in Ottoman administration. While serving as a scribe, he had traveled around the empire and studied its geography and history in depth. But, at one point, he realized that he had begun to forget his readings and observations. Thus, during his retirement in Damascus with access to a well-stocked library, he set out to write down all he had seen and read. The result is an extensive compilation in three volumes presented to Sultan Mehmed III (r. 1595–1603). [30]

The *Menāzır*'s Istanbul entry brings to light an erudite scholar's extensive research and reflections. This is a remarkably lengthy section, many times longer than all other *ʿAcā'ib* Istanbul entries. It is also unique in the depth of its coverage. Mehmed Aşık not only evaluates the information in three Arabic geographical works in depth but also includes a lengthy citation from the contemporaneous Ottoman Turkish history of Hoca Saadeddin (d.1599) about ancient Istanbul. This section is followed by an account of the early Islamic sieges and the Ottoman conquest as well as detailed descriptions of mosque-complexes, commercial buildings and public spaces of the Ottoman city.[31]Unlike the earli-

29 Mehmed Aşık, *Menâzırü'l-Avâlim,* ed. M. Ak (Ankara 2007), vol 3, 1054–1098. For Mehmed Aşık, see also G. Hagen, "Traveler Mehmed Aşık", in *Essays on Ottoman Civilization. Proceedings of the XIIth Congress of the Comité International d'Études Pré-Ottomanes et Ottomanes (CIÉPO*) (Prag 1998), 145–54.

30 For the *Menāzır,* see the extensive introduction in Mahmud Ak's meticulous critical edition.

31 For Mehmed Aşık's use of sources, see M. Ak, "Menâzırü'l- Avâlim ve Kaynağı Takvîmü'l-büldân", in M. Kütükoğlu (ed.), *Prof. Dr. Bekir Kütükoğlu'na Armağan* (Istanbul 1991), 101–20.

er Ottoman *ʿAcā'ibs*, contemporaneous Ottoman monuments occupy a significant place in this work. Still, Mehmed Aşık also does not minimize the place of ancient statuary in the city. On the contrary, he meticulously translates from Arabic works such as Abu'l-Fida's (d. 1331) *Taqwīm al-buldān* (Geography of Abu'l-Fida) (c. 1321) and Zakariya Qazwini's (d.1283) *Āthār al-bilād wa-akhbār al-ʿibād (*Monuments of the Lands and Reports of God's Servants*)* as well as the *Kharīdat al-ʿAjā'ib,* and compares these earlier sources with contemporaneous Ottoman books as well as his own observations.

When stories about a sculpture of a bronze horseman intrigue him, for instance, he sets out to locate it. Combining information from Arabic and Ottoman works with his own personal observations of Istanbul, he conjectures whether such a monument still exists in his time and if so, where it could be found. He notes that although many earlier writers mentioned the sculpture's location as a place near the Hippodrome, it cannot be found there. Considering whether the sculpture stood somewhere else, he asks whether it used to be on top of the column located between "the Mosques of Ali Paşa and the bathhouse Valide Sultan," in other words, Çemberlitaş.[32] Noting that "there is no bronze rider nor horse on top of it in our times," he concludes that the sculpture must have "either fallen down before the conquest or perished during the days of conquest."[33] In short, in Mehmed Aşık's Istanbul entry, differing reports from diverse sources about the ancient Constantinople and Ottoman Istanbul, as well as his own observations, are woven together in an all-encompassing compilation. Here, as with the previous Ottoman *ʿAcā'ib* writers, he does not overwrite stories of an ancient city but transmits earlier stories about the pre-conquest past along with a contemporary commentary.

Mehmed Aşık's Istanbul entry must have appealed to other contemporaneous Istanbulites who were also interested in the city's lost ancient monuments. For instance, Şerif b. Seyyid Muhammed, who translated an Arabic book of prognostication into Turkish in 1597–98, also transmitted a detailed description of the bronze horseman based on the *ʿAcā'ibs* with a brief commentary on whether the monument had in fact existed. "Those mechanical and constructed wonders that we see have been completely destroyed and are no longer

32 Mehmed Aşık, *Menāzirü'l-ʿavālim,* 3:1070: "fî-zemânînâ Câmi'-i Alî Paşa ile Hammâm-ı Vâlide Sultân beyninde olan..."

33 Ibid.: "bu fâris ile feres bu iki sütundan birisinin res'inde var idüğünün takdîr-ı sıhhati üzre ya kable'l-feṭḥ sâkıt olmışdur veyâhud eyyâm-ı feṭḥde zâyi' olmışdur."

extant," he writes, "but how many ancient talismans and old buildings that are actually here for example the obelisk and the serpent column in Atmeydanı [the hippodrome]. The fact that these things still remain points that the author and other histories have conveyed."[34] Thus, like Mehmed Aşık, Şerif b. Seyyid Muhammed considers earlier works as reliable sources and consults these works to learn about a lost ancient monument. A lingering question remains as to why ancient monuments and their stories mattered to them. To address this question, let us now turn to our case study: the Bronze Horseman.

Bronze Horseman of Constantine

It is not surprising that it was the sculpture of the bronze horseman that intrigued Mehmed Aşık and drew him to seek it out in Istanbul. As the sculpture was removed almost a century before and the column demolished at some point during the 1550s, Mehmed Aşık was unable to find any trace of it. However, the bronze horseman had an exceptional place in Arabic *ʿAcāʾibs*, which he meticulously studied. Among the hundreds of ancient sculptures and columns, as well as monumental gates, palaces, and churches that adorned the medieval Constantinople, for many medieval Arabic *ʿAcāʾib* writers, the major landmark of the city was the bronze horseman. It was also this sculpture that was described in greater detail than any other in Ottoman ʿAcāʾibs and included in almost all of them even a century after its demolition.

As Boeck shows in her fascinating new book, this "Eiffel tower of its epoch" impressed its medieval observers with its size, elevated location, artistic qualities, and enduring message across cultures.[35] The sculpture was also laden with rich symbolism for diverse audiences and eulogized in numerous Byzantine, Slavic, Crusader, and Islamic accounts of the city. While it acquired new meanings in time and meant different things for people from different places, for many, it was a profound display of, and a warning about, power.[36]

34 Translated by C. Fleischer, in Boeck, *The Bronze Horseman*, 378. See also *Tercüme-i Cifrü'l Cāmī*, İUK TY6624, fol. 92v: "Bu zikr olunan ʿAcāʾib ve ṭılsımāt ve ṭevārīḫde masṭūr gördügümüz ġarāʾib-i binā ve sınāʿāt ḥālā biʾl-külliye münhedim ve münʿadim olub İstanbul'da bunlardan āsar bāḳī degüldür āmmā nice ṭılsımāt-ı ḳadīme ve eski binālar vardır. Dikilü taşlar ve At Meydanı'nda olan ejderler gibi ki muṣannifiñ zikr itdüginiñ vuḳūʿuna ve ṭevārīḫde yazduklarınuñ sıḥḥatına delālet ider."

35 Boeck, *The Bronze Horseman*, 3.

36 Ibid., 314–335 and 366–383.

For Ottoman *ʿAcāʾib* writers as well the sculpture was both an embodiment of preternatural forces and an admonishment for the futility of this-worldly pursuits. Following Arabic sources almost verbatim, they identify the rider as Constantine, who had placed his tomb on a monumental column marked with an equestrian sculpture of himself.[37] After admiring the horse's life-like features, they focus on the hands of the rider and describe what it held. Mustafa b. Ali, for example, writes, "Constantine has a talisman in his hand to keep away the enemies. According to some, the following is written on his left hand: 'I could not hold fast to the world. All I have is what is left on my palm.' It means 'I left the material world, unable to hold on to it.'"[38] Thus, two interpretations of the raised hands are provided together. In one of them, the hand holds a talisman and the gesture towards the East protects the city from an invasion. The other open hand, which could not hold the worldly possessions, illustrates the emptiness of worldly ambition.

Mustafa b. Ali's depiction of the bronze horseman is almost a word-by-word translation from the *Kharīdat al-ʿAjāʾib*, which is reproduced very similarly by Mahmud el-Hatib and Mehmet Aşık as well as by almost all other sixteenth-century Ottoman ʿAcāʾib writers.[39] It is interesting to find such verbatim descrip-

37 See El-Cheikh, *Byzantium Viewed by the Arabs*, 208–209 and S. Yerasimos, "De l'arbre à la pomme: Généalogie d'un thème apocalyptique" in B. Lellouch and S. Yerasimos (eds), *Les traditions apocalyptiques au tournant de la chute de Constantinople* (Paris 1999), 165–170.

38 *Tuḥfetü'z-Zaman*, ed. İstanbullu, 217. See also Mustafa b. Ali, *Tuḥfetü'z-Zamān,* fol. 197a: "Konstantin'in elinde tılsım vardır. Düşman gelmeyi men eyler ve bazıları dedi ki sol elinde yazılmıştır ki dünya mülkü elinde kalmadı. İlla şu avucum içinde ne var ise bu kaldı. Yani işbu mülk-i dünyadan çıktım bir nesneye kâdir olmadım demektir."

39 While almost all Ottoman ʿAcāʾibs include the same description of the bronze horseman, there were also a few exceptions, which I plan to examine later. A late sixteenth-century Ottoman Turkish collection of wonder stories, for example, follows Ibn Rustah's (d. after 903) Persian account. Here the bronze horseman is the son of Hagia Sophia's architect and welcomes people to the church. In the same collection, there is also the description of a sculpture of Constantine (without a horse) who stands outside the city walls and points towards Maghrib. The gesture is interpreted as a sign of the city's destruction by winds from that direction. See BL Harleian 5500, fol. 29b & 183b–184a and G. Gürel, "Picturing Wonders, Magic and Antiquities in Ms. British Library Harleian 5500, ca.1595–1600", PhD dissertation under preparation, University of Oxford. I am indebted to G. Gürel for generously sharing her research with me. There are also works like the early fifteenth-century translation of Tusi and the *Dürr-i Meknūn* which do not have any description of the bronze horseman.

tions in almost all Ottoman ʿAcāʾibs. Did not the Ottoman writers perceive the sculpture's talismanic power problematic after the armies from "the east" began to rule Istanbul? And why did they urge their readers to look at the empty hand of a colossal sculpture rather than its grandeur in their new capital?

A threat or protection? An interpretative debate in the fifteenth-century

Let me begin to address these questions by discussing the aspects of the bronze horseman which would have been controversial to fifteenth-century Ottoman observers which the sixteenth-century *ʿAcāʾib* writers overlooked. When we look at late-fifteenth century Ottoman works other than the *ʿAcāʾibs*, we observe a lively discussion about the sculpture's power and whether it was a threat to Ottomans. By contrast, sixteenth-century Ottoman *ʿAcāʾibs* are conspicuously silent about such a harmful talisman. They completely neglected the concerns of the fifteenth-century Ottoman writers and wrote about the bronze horseman as a beneficial talisman instead. Let us see what they did not cover.

Medieval *ʿAcāʾibs* presented the bronze horseman as a protection of the city for centuries. The sculpture's power, as Boeck discusses, was understood not solely symbolically but also as an actual force. Drawing on Roman traditions that attributed preternatural forces to the statues of emperors, many medieval Byzantine historians as well as Arab travelers to Constantinople noted that the bronze horseman's raised hand was to stop invasion from the East.[40] Medieval ʿacāʾib writers joined them.[41] Although none elaborated on how exactly this power worked, it must have been what Persis Berlakamp terms "efficacy by symmetry."[42] Like lion and dragon reliefs that were intended to guard early thirteenth-century Bagdad, Konya, and Aleppo by frightening off monstrous enemies and misfortunes, the emperor on his horse was to stop the invading armies.

Shortly after the conquest, however, the talismanic power became a source

40 Boeck, *The Bronze Horseman,* 72–97.

41 Numerous other antiquities were also seen as talismans in around the medieval Islamic world. See S. Redford, "The Seljuks of Rum and the Antique", *Muqarnas*, 10 (1993), 148–156 and J. Gonnella, "Columns and hieroglyphs: Magic Spolia in medieval Islamic architecture of Northern Syria", *Muqarnas,* 27 (2011), 103–120.

42 P. Berlekamp, "Symmetry, Sympathy, and Sensation", *Representations (Special Issue: Images at Work)*, 133 (2016), 67–68.

of concern for some who claimed that the bronze horseman could deliver the city back to its Greek inhabitants. According one late-fifteenth century observer, they warned the sultan about the stories circulating among the former Byzantines and even succeeded in destroying the threat.

"Story-mongers gossiped about [the bronze horseman]," wrote Dervish Karamani, "and on their word Sultan Mehemmed Han Gazi (may God's extensive mercy be upon him) had it pulled down."[43]

It is difficult to ascertain whether there were indeed such stories about the sculpture's talismanic power circulating among the Greek inhabitants of Istanbul. The sculpture must have been important for the city's non-Muslim inhabitants as a memory place, but we do not know whether it was associated with any portent about the city's recapture.[44] There were other sites associated with an apocalyptic victory. The last Byzantine emperor Constantine XI (r. 1449–53), for example, was believed to have been turned into marble at a cave near Golden Gate from which he would emerge to liberate the city.[45] The bronze horseman, however, was noted more as a portent for the decline of Byzantine fortunes rather than their revival. Castilian traveler Pero Tafur (d. c. 1484), who visited Constantinople in 1437–38, for example, narrated how the toppling of the orb from the hand of the bronze horseman was viewed as an ominous sign of the impending fall of the city.[46]

A story about the bronze horseman as a talisman against the plague, which late fifteenth-century Ottoman Turkish anonymous chronicles report from Greek sources, further complicates our understandings. A late fifteenth-century

43 Derviş Şemseddin Mehmed Karamani, *Tārīḫ-i Ayāṣofya,* TSK Revan 1498, Fol. 27b, translated and cited in J. Raby, "Mehmed the Conqueror and the Equestrian Statue of the Augustaion", 309: "Onu ġammāzlar ġamz idib söziyle Sulṭan Meḥemmed Ḫan Gāzī (raḥmat Allāh ʿalayhi raḥmatan wāsiʿatan) yıkdırdı." See also Boeck, *The Bronze Horseman,* 331.

44 In an Armenian elegy by Abraham Akiwracʿi, who was probably in Istanbul in 1453, for example, Justinian and his bronze horseman are praised as signs of the grandeur of the city's Byzantine rulers. See A. K. Sanjian, "Two Contemporary Armenian Elegies on the Fall of Constantinople, 1453", *Viator, Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, 1 (1971), 223–262.

45 A. Papayianni, "He Polis healo: The Fall of Constantinople in 1453 in Post-Byzantine Popular Literature," *Al-Masāq*, 22.1 (2010), 41–42. See also D.M. Nikol, *Immortal Emperor, The Life and legend of Constantine Palaiologos the last Byzantine Emperor* (Cambridge 1992), 101–118 and G. Necipoğlu, "Volatile Urban Landscapes between Mythical Space and Time," in S. Hamadeh and Ç. Kafescioğlu (eds), *A Companion to Early Modern Istanbul* (Leiden 2021), 197–232.

46 Boeck, *The Bronze Horseman,* 257–258.

Ottoman historian notes that "some people say that it was a talisman. According to Infidel belief, the plague did not enter Istanbul."[47] Although the writer does not include further information nor describe how the talisman works, it is interesting to find such a beneficial use in these books for two reasons. First, as discussed at length by several modern historians, anonymous chronicles expressed Turco-Muslim ghazi sensibilities and opposed Mehmed II's close ties to the members of the former Byzantine aristocracy.[48] Thus, one would have expected them to present a Byzantine sculpture associated with the city's non-Muslim inhabitants as the source of a threat rather than protection. And second, the writer clearly identifies the belief as "infidel" (*kāfir*) and attributes the story to the Greek inhabitants. Thus, according to these Muslim ghazi chronicles, the bronze horseman of the Greeks was not a talisman for the reconquest of the city from the Ottomans but rather provided protection from the plague. [49]

It is possible that stories, which eventually resulted in the sculpture's destruction, were just what contemporary writers like Dervish Karamani claimed them to be: "gossips of story-mongers." Those uncomfortable with the colossal sculpture's pronounced place at a major Istanbul square and discontent with the power of the former Greek aristocracy in Mehmed's court might have evoked *'Acā'ib* stories about the sculpture's talismanic power, presented it as a threat, and demanded its destruction.[50] And even if there were Greek stories in

47 Yerasimos, *Légendes d'empire,* 28. For the Ottoman Turkish text, see S. Yerasimos, *Türk Metinlerinde Konstaniyye ve Ayasofya Efsaneleri*, trans. Ş. Tekeli (Istanbul 1993), 31: "Bazılar dirler kim ol bakır at tılsım idi kim, yani kâfirler itikadı üzerine kim İstanbul'a ta'un girmezdi."

48 The literature is vast. See for example, C. Kafadar, *Between Two Worlds: The Construction of the Ottoman State* (Berkeley 1995).

49 Stories about bow-bearing sculptures of Heraclius and Apollo offering protection against plague circulated in ancient Thrace. They could have been still around when Ottoman chroniclers lived and wrote in Thracian cities and known in Istanbul. For the bow-bearing sculptures as talismans against the plague, see C. A. Faraone, *Talismans and Trojan Horses: Guardian Statues in Ancient Greek Myth and Ritual* (New York 1992), 61.

50 Late fifteenth-century Istanbul, as Molly Greene reminds us, was a remarkably Byzantine city that the former elite continued to enjoy positions of power. See M. Greene, *The Edinburgh History of the Greeks, 1453 to 1768: The Ottoman Empire* (Edinburgh 2015), 24–28. For the discontent voiced by late fifteenth-century Muslim historians about the grand vezir from a Byzantine elite family, see H. İnalcık, "The Policy of Mehmed II toward the Greek Population of Istanbul and the Byzantine Buildings of the City", *Dumbarton Oaks Papers,* 23/24 (1969), 244–45.

circulation about such a power, it was likely this familiarity with *ʿAcā'ib* stories which transformed the bronze horseman into a source of danger and resulted in its destruction.

Significantly, Arabic *ʿAcā'ib* stories were harnessed not only to destroy but also vindicate the bronze horseman in the fifteenth century. In fact, Derviş Karamani's translations of the history of Hagia Sophia from Greek into Persian and Turkish completed in 1480s is an elaborate defense of the bronze horseman. Neither the original Greek nor an earlier Turkish translation by a certain Yusuf b. Musa includes any mention of the bronze horseman.[51] Yet, the sculpture's destruction seems to have prompted Derviş Karamani to include a lengthy story into his translations. Here, he identifies the horseman as Justinian and presents the sculpture's patronage as the last will of a pious ruler. According to him, Justinian ordered the sculpture on his death bed to leave behind a useful public work. While including this explanation about the bronze horseman's construction, Derviş Karamani omits any mention of its talismanic use. In his account, the bronze horseman is not a talisman at all, but only a source of admonishment.[52]

After Derviş Karamani, the bronze horseman's controversial memory as a talisman seems to have been forgotten. The only Ottoman Turkish ʿAcā'ib writer who mentioned Mehmed II's destruction is Ibrahim b. Bali, a late fifteenth-century traveler to Istanbul from Antioch.[53] Later Ottoman *ʿAcā'ib* writers did not perceive any danger. They also did not discuss why, or how, it was destroyed. At a time when neither fear from an immediate military invasion nor discontent about an imposing landmark existed, the bronze horseman's talismanic legacy was no longer a threat. The story's appeal now seems to concentrate on its moral message.

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51 Yusuf b. Musa, *Ṭārīḫ-i Ayasofya*, SK Yazma Bağışlar 02057. See also G. Necipoğlu, "The Life of an Imperial Monument: Hagia Sophia after Byzantium", in R. Mark and A. Çakmak (eds), *Hagia Sophia from the Age of Justinian to the Present* (Cambridge 1992), 198–202.

52 Historians such as İdris-i Bitlisi (d.1520), who used Derviş Karamani as a source for his Persian chronicle, and Hoca Saaddedin (d. 1599), who translated Idris-i Bitlisi's work into Ottoman Turkish, transmitted this version of bronze horseman in their chronicles.

53 In his ʿAcā'ib written in 1488, İbrahim b. Bali, praises the bronze horseman noting that Mehmed II removed it from the column after the conquest. İbrahim b. Bali, *Hikmet-Nâme*, ed. M. Altun (Ankara 2017), 178: "Meger sultân Muhammed ibn-i 'Osmân/ Kılıcak ol yiri âhir müselmân/ Kopardı mîlden düşürdi anı/ Turupdur şimdi mîl üzre nişânı". https://ekitap.ktb.gov.tr/TR-194369/ibrahim-ibn-i-bali-hikmet-name.html (accessed 11 April 2022).

An ancient ruler's enduring message in the sixteenth-century

According to sixteenth-century Ottoman *ʿAcā'ib* writers, Constantine erected his sculpture not to announce his sovereignty or dazzle his onlookers but to warn them about the transitory nature of the world. He addressed them with an inscription. Many of their contemporaneous readers must have found the story familiar as ancient inscriptions admonishing their viewer was a common trope in Ottoman literature. For example, in Ahmedi's popular narrative poem (d.1413) *İskendernāme* (Book of Alexander), Alexander discovers an inscription left for him by an Egyptian pharaoh in his tomb. The pharaoh commands him:

> You who say I have the East and the West
> You, who always fight with anyone,
> Do not be careless with the unaffectionate fortune
> It gives respite to none.[54]

The pharaoh then introduces himself and tells how he ruled the whole world for a thousand and two hundred years, collecting immense wealth and a massive army. But he warns,

> My possessions were of no use
> See me, draw a lesson; It should suffice.
> The wealth and treasure I had gathered with sweat and strife
> Grass has them all, leaving me with snakes and aches."[55]

54 Ahmedi, *İskendernāme*, ed. Yaşar Akdoğan (TC Kültür Bakanlığı Kütüphaneler ve Yayınlar Genel Müdürlüğü, published online, 2019), 466. http://ekitap.yek.gov.tr/Uploads/ProductsFiles/9f71ce80-6562-4152-a39e-c202f5d25f43.pdf (accessed April 2022):

"7455 K'iy benüm ola diyüben şark u garb
İns ü cinn-ile iden peyveste harb
7446 Garre olma çarha k'ol nâ-mihrûbân
Kimseye virmedi vü virmez emân"

55 Ibid. :

"7464 Mâl u mülküm fayid' itmedi baña
Bini gör ibret yiterem ben saña
7465 Zahmet-ile dirdügüm ol mâl u genç
Ayrug almış baña kalmış mâr u renc"

According to Ahmedi, the lesson from an ancient inscription plays a key role in Alexander's spiritual transformation. After reading the poem in tears, Alexander sets out for the Ka'ba, directs himself solely towards God, and attains spiritual perfection.[56]

Examples of ancient inscriptions providing moral instruction abound in Islamic literature. There are also records of several inscriptions, now lost, which admonished their viewers. For example, during a visit to the Persepolis in 1471 an Akkoyunlu ruler had inscribed on the ancient walls his message for other visitors. "Do not seek the kingdom of Solomon, for that is [now] dust," he wrote, "Of these jewels and treasures which were beyond counting, what has [the hero] Jam carried away."[57] Similar verses were also displayed on Anatolian city walls. A now lost Arabic inscription at a castle near Manavgat in Southern Anatolia, for example, stated "be not vain of thy splendid apparel: I have experienced those delusions: the world is open to people of all ranks."[58] In both cases, the inscription speaks directly to the observer and warns about vanity, a lesson which is frequently brought up for other contexts in earlier Arabic as well as Ottoman works.[59]

We cannot ascertain whether readers of Ottoman *'Acā'ib* entries would have

56 For the Ottoman Books of Alexander as a *bildungsroman*, see C. Goodwin Sawyer, "Alexander, History and Piety: A Study of Ahmedî's 14th-Century Ottoman *Iskendernâme*", unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 1997 and D. Kastritsis, "The Alexander romance and the rise of the Ottoman Empire", in A. C. S. Peacock and S. N. Yıldız (eds), *Islamic Literature and Intellectual Life in Fourteenth-and Fifteenth-Century Anatolia* (Würzburg 2016), 243–284.

57 The inscription did not survive, but was recorded in a collection during medieval times. R. P. Mottahedeh, "The Eastern Travels of Solomon: Reimagining Persepolis and the Iranian Past" in M. Cook (ed. et al.), *Law and Tradition in Classical Islamic Thought: Studies in Honor of Professor Hossein Modarressi* (New York 2013), 259.

58 S. Redford, "The water of life, the vanity of mortal existence and a penalty of 2,500 denarii: Thoughts on the reuse of classical and Byzantine remains in Seljuk cities", in E. Key Fowden (ed. et al.), *Cities as Palimpsests,* (published online 2022), 93–94.

59 For examples of admonishment for vanity and its contemplation through ruins in Arabic sources, see E. Zychowicz-Coghill, "Medieval Arabic archaeologies of the ancient cities of Syria", in *Cities as Palimpsests,* 344–345. For an early seventeenth-century Ottoman example of site/monument/object becoming a cause for warning, see M. Taner, "Two Paths to Power: Sokolluzade Hasan Paşa and Hadım Yusuf Paşa and their art patronage in early seventeenth-century Bagdad", *Osmanlı Araştırmaları/The Journal of Ottoman Studies*, 54 (2019), 85–86.

also seen words of admonishment inscribed on ancient monuments or knew stories about them, and if so, whether they would make any connections with the message of the bronze horseman. We also do not know whether *ʿAcā'ibs* were read aloud in gatherings and used as prompts for further discussion during which participants could brought up examples from the places they had visited and books they had read. Still, these stories remind us of the significance of the lessons to be drawn from ancient monuments for the Ottoman audiences. Following a well-known topos, the bronze horseman invited his Ottoman observers to look at his empty hand and contemplate the transitory nature of life.

Concluding Remarks

The story about the bronze horseman is an example of the variety of the ways in which Ottoman *ʿAcā'ib* writers took their readers on a journey into the deep past of Istanbul. In her study on medieval guidebooks to Rome, Anna Blennow discusses how *mirablia* present ancient Rome to fifteenth-century readers by making the invisible visible.[60] Similarly, Ottoman *ʿAcā'ibs* display the lost monuments of ancient Istanbul to their sixteenth-century readers and tell why they matter. While some writers such as Mustafa b. Ali and Mehmed Aşık include lengthy depictions of contemporaneous Ottoman and Muslim life, none overlook the antiquities and their messages. We need further research to understand why they transmitted stories about ancient monuments from Arabic and how their narratives supported, or challenged, accounts in other Ottoman works such as anonymous chronicles, Stories of Hagia Sophia, or the chapters on ancient civilizations in sixteenth-century universal chronicles. We are also yet to explore whether there were any other readers like Mehmed Aşık who set out to observe the antiquities in the sixteenth-century urban fabric and how their tours compare with those of the city's European antiquarian visitors. A rich body of material, as this article has aimed to show, awaits the researcher interested in discovering vivacious afterlives of Byzantine antiquities in Ottoman Istanbul. The deep past mattered to many Ottoman writers, and they urged their readers, now us, to pay attention to it.

Engaging with this material, however, is not easy. To appreciate what *ʿAcā'ib*

60 A. Blennow, "Wanderers and Wonders. The Medieval Guidebooks to Rome", in A. Blennow and S. Fogelberg Rota (eds), *Rome and the Guidebook Tradition, From the Middle Ages to the 20th Century* (Berlin and Boston 2019), 71.

writers are doing, we need to suspend our contemporary expectations from a "correct" historical account of an antique monument and be open to understand what Ottoman writers wanted to tell about them. Drawing on Arabic *ʿAcā'ibs,* they transmitted centuries old stories about Istanbul's major landmarks as known at the time. Like us, they were interested in providing information about who erected these monuments and why. Yet, unlike us, they did not situate the ancient monuments in a distant time which was separate from their own. For them, the history was alive in the contemporary urban fabric. They urged their readers to observe this history and contemplate (*tefekkür*) on its lessons. In the case of the bronze horseman, for example, they transmitted an enduring message from antiquity to compel the reader to reflect on the display of power over the cityscape. They would have surely been amazed, if they knew that today Ottoman history could be clearly separated from the Byzantine history and that for us stories about the ancient monuments had lost most of their power.