

Ottoman Occultism and its Social Contexts: Preliminary Remarks

MARINOS SARIYANNIS (Rethymno)¹

The history of occultism (or, to use a slightly different term, esotericism) has largely been limited to a field of intellectual history. The history of Islamic occultism duly follows this rule.² Nevertheless, as with all cultural phenomena, occultism is imbued with the specific cultural and social connotations of the

-
- 1 Earlier drafts of this paper were read at to the 2021 Meeting of the European Network for the Study of Islam and Esotericism (ENSIE) (29 September – 1 October 2021 on Zoom): “Islam and Esotericism: Societies, Politics, and Practices”, and at the 34. Deutsche Orientalistentag (Berlin, 12–17 September 2022). I wish to thank all participants in both venues for their suggestions, as well as Dimitris Giagtzoglou for his important help. Research for this article was made under the research 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, CoGr2017 no. 771766).
 - 2 Here I prefer “occultism” in order to avoid confusion with the common Sufi doctrine of “esoteric knowledge” (*bāṭin*). I take it as the belief in the possibility of manipulating natural forces and states (including visions of the future) by the use of (usually, but not always, secret) knowledge and supernatural powers (through magic, miracle-working, appealing to supernatural entities etc.). See the relevant discussion by L. Saif, “What is Islamic Esotericism?”, *Correspondences* 7/1 (2019), 1–59.

Copyright: © 2022 The Institute for Mediterranean Studies/FORTH and the Author(s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC-BY 4.0), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.
See <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>.

Aca'ib: Occasional papers on the Ottoman perceptions of the supernatural is an open access journal published by the Institute for Mediterranean Studies/FORTH.

Sariyannis, Marinos. 2022. “Ottoman Occultism and its Social Contexts: Preliminary Remarks”. *Aca'ib: Occasional papers on the Ottoman perceptions of the supernatural* 3.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.26225/txbk-hk21>

various contexts in which it is situated. Examining it from a broader perspective of cultural or, even better, social history will help us locating it within the interplay of various social and cultural actors and explaining the motives and aims of those adopting certain occultist ideas. To understand how occultism functioned in a given society, we should examine which social groups favoured esotericism and why and in what cultural context they did so. Furthermore, it is important to investigate who fought against occultism and why, as well as why certain authors revert to specific traditions. Lastly, understand the manner in which occultism functioned requires clarity regarding the role of vernacular culture and the role of social status.

This paper proffers some ways in which the study of Ottoman occultism can benefit from looking at its social context. It poses the following questions: how did occultism, closely bound with palace politics in the sixteenth century, become a mainly Sufi occupation from the seventeenth century onwards, and what does this mean for its place in society? What was the attitude of the “Salafist” trends vis-à-vis esoteric beliefs, and what social strata did each of these groups represent? Which authors emphasised hermetic ideas of knowledge as revelation, and who kept advocating reason as the main source of knowledge? How did vernacular culture, with its spectacular rise from the late seventeenth century on, deal with occult sciences and esoteric beliefs?

Such questions inevitably lead to the thorny problem of methodology: how do we identify social strata represented in books and epistles dealing with metaphysical questions and arcane tools for establishing contact with the supernatural? An even cursory review of these sources will show that rarely do they mention the name of their author, and it is even more rare to find any kind of information on whoever author is named. The path we chose here was to emphasise the Sufi affiliations of our sources. The reason is two-fold: firstly, identifying the Sufi attachments of an author of an even anonymous treatise is much easier, especially in texts of esoteric tendencies: when they do not list Sufi fraternities showing a more or less clear preference for one among them, they almost always will take sides in debates heavily coloured by intra-Sufi conflict. Secondly, Ottoman society was deeply integrated through Sufi culture, and as it has been said, by the eighteenth century “membership of the religious orders was practically synonymous with the profession of Islam”.³ This means that

3 H. A. R. Gibb and H. Bowen, *Islamic Society and the West: A Study of the Impact of West-*

these affiliations also played a role of social statement: although we know very well that differentiation within a fraternity was extremely important, we can identify some major fraternities with specific, albeit fluid, social groups. It is up to the reader to judge if the results of our investigation justify this approach; for the moment, we have to stress that this is a preliminary study, and more evidence will surely be needed for more definitive conclusions.⁴

For various reasons, mainly for the sake of brevity, I limit myself largely to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when information on the Sufi and intellectual currents is less scarce and also when occultism somehow becomes more differentiated and debated. Until the very end of the sixteenth century, it seems like occult sciences were quite widespread, from the palace (from Bayezid II's to Murad III's occultist quests)⁵ to the most vernacular dervish brotherhoods, to the degree that some scholars (in particular, Matthew Melvin-Koushki) have talked of a "lettrist imperialism" as a characteristic of Ottoman politics.⁶ In this

ern Civilization on Moslem Culture in the Near East, volume One: *Islamic Society in the Eighteenth Century*, Part II (Oxford 1957), 76. For an overview of Ottoman Sufism, see A. Karamustafa, *God's Unruly Friends: Dervish Groups in the Islamic Later Middle Period, 1200–1550* (Salt Lake City 1994); A. Y. Ocak (ed.), *Sufism and Sufis in Ottoman Society: Sources-Doctrine-Rituals-Turuq-Architecture-Literature-Iconography-Modernism* (Ankara 2005).

- 4 Scholarship on the social basis of particular Sufi brotherhoods is surprisingly scarce. One may envisage a research agenda cataloguing sheikhs and their social backgrounds, texts and their contexts, lodges and their locations. On this last aspect, cf. A. Y. Yükses, "Sufis and the Sufi Lodges in Istanbul in the Late Nineteenth Century: A Socio-Spatial Analysis", *Journal of Urban History* 0(0) (2021) <https://doi.org/10.1177/00961442211025253>; on the study of Sufi texts with a view to highlight political or social tensions, the work of scholars such as Derin Terzioğlu, Aslihan Gürbüzel or Betül Yavuz is promising. Extensive lists of sheikhs, their affiliations and their tekkes may be found in N. Yılmaz, *Osmanlı toplumunda tasavvuf: Süfîler, devlet ve ulemâ* (Istanbul 2001).
- 5 On the former, see A. T. Şen, "Reading the Stars at the Ottoman Court: Bâyezîd II (r. 886/1481–918/1512) and His Celestial Interests", *Arabica* 64 (2017), 557–608; various chapters in Gülru Necipoğlu, Cemal Kafadar and Cornell H. Fleischer (eds), *Treasures of knowledge: an inventory of the Ottoman Palace Library (1502/3–1503/4)*, Leiden 2019. On the latter, Ö. Felek, "(Re)creating Image and Identity: Dreams and Visions as a Means of Murad III's Self-Fashioning", in Ö. Felek and A. Knysh (eds), *Dreams and Visions in Islamic Societies* (New York 2012); Ö. Felek, *Kitâbü'l-menâmât: Sultan III. Murad'ın rüya mektupları* (Istanbul 2012).
- 6 M. Melvin-Koushki, "Toward a Neopythagorean Historiography: Kemâlpaşazâde's (d. 1534) Lettrist Call for the Conquest of Cairo and the Development of Ottoman Oc-

regard, the Ottoman Empire was no different from the other great Muslim states of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, intellectually dominated by a rise of a lettrist occultism based on alphanumerical calculations, on the footsteps of Abdurrahman al-Biṣṭāmī (d. 1454), who spread al-Būnī's ideas and practices in the Ottoman lands.⁷ Throughout the sixteenth century, lettrist divination or medicine was practiced by personalities such as the historian Idrīs Bidlīsī (d. 1520), the şeyhülislam Kemālpaşazāde (d. 1534) or the judge, biographer and encyclopaedist Taşköprüzāde Aḥmed (d. 1561).⁸

Among the Sufi orders, one may postulate that the Bayrāmī brotherhoods were the keenest on spreading the lettrist cause, as witnessed by scholars and sheikhs such as Akşemseddin or İlyas b. İsā Sarūḥānī (d. 1559).⁹ The Bayrāmī-

cult-Scientific Imperialism”, in L. Saif, F. Leoni, M. Melvin-Koushki and F. Yahya (eds), *Islamic Occultism in Theory and Practice* (Leiden 2020), 380–419. Cf. C. H. Fleischer, “Seer to the Sultan: Haydar-i Remmal and Sultan Süleyman”, in J. L. Warner (ed.), *Cultural Horizons: A Festschrift in Honor of Talat S. Halman*, 2 vols (Syracuse 2001), 1:290–299; Idem, “Shadow of Shadows: Prophecy in Politics in 1530s Istanbul”, in B. Tezcan – K. Barbir (eds), *Identity and Identity Formation in the Ottoman World: A Volume of Essays in Honor of Norman Itzkowitz* (Madison 2007), 51–62; Idem, “Ancient Wisdom and New Sciences: Prophecies at the Ottoman Court in the Fifteenth and Early Sixteenth Centuries”, in M. Farhad and S. Bağcı (eds), *Falnama: The Book of Omens* (Washington 2009), 231–244.

7 D. Grill, « Esotérisme contre hérésie : ‘Abd al-Rahmān al-Biṣṭāmī, un représentant de la science des lettres à Bursa dans la première moitié du XVI^e siècle », in G. Veinstein (ed.), *Syncretismes et hérésies dans l’Orient seldjoukide et ottoman (XIV^e-XVIII^e siècle). Actes du Colloque du Collège de France, octobre 2001* (Paris – Louvain 2005), 183–195; Fleischer, “Ancient Wisdom and New Sciences”; J.-Ch. Coulon, *La magie en terre d’Islam au Moyen Âge* (Paris 2017), 229–232; Idem, “Building al-Buni’s Legend: The Figure of al-Buni through Abd al-Rahman al-Bistami’s *Shams al-afaq*”, *Journal of Sufi Studies*, 5:1 (2016), 1–26; N. Gardiner, “Esotericist Reading Communities and the Early Circulation of the Sufi Occultist Ahmad al-Buni’s Works”, *Arabica*, 64 (2017), 405–441.

8 Melvin-Koushki, “Toward a Neopythagorean Historiography”; idem, “Taşköprüzāde on the (Occult) Science of Plague Prevention and Cure”, *Nazarîyat* 6/2 (2020), 133–168.

9 A. Gölpınarlı, *Melâmîlik ve Melâmîler* (Istanbul 1931); V. R. Holbrook, “İbn ‘Arabi and Ottoman Dervish Traditions: The Melâmî Supra-Order”, parts I-II, published in <https://ibnarabisociety.org/melami-supra-order-part-one-victoria-rowe-holbrook/> and <https://ibnarabisociety.org/melami-supra-order-part-two-victoria-rowe-holbrook/> (accessed September 2022); N. Clayer, A. Popovic and T. Zarccone (eds), *Melâmîs – Bayrâmîs: Etudes sur trois mouvements mystiques musulmans* (Istanbul 1998); F. Betül Yavuz, “The Making of a Sufi Order between Heresy and Legitimacy: Bayrāmī-Malâmîs in the Ottoman Empire”, unpublished Ph.D. diss., Rice University 2013; Eadem, “Bayrāmîye”, *Encyclopedia of Islam Thre*e. On Sarūḥānī, more particularly, see A. Özgül, “İlyas b. İsâ-yı Saruhānī’nin ‘Rumüzü’l-künûz’ adlı eserinin transkripsiyonu ve değer-

Melâmîs, then mainly based on the Balkan provinces rather than Istanbul, often were also proponents of the *tenâsub* or reincarnation theory, which, it seems, they were sharing with the more rural Bektaşîs.¹⁰ The latter, sharing a great deal of common esoteric and indeed lettrist beliefs with the Hürûfis of Azerbaijan,¹¹ were transformed from a predominantly rural and nomadic brotherhood to an urban one through their connection with the janissaries (but also due to a conscious effort of appropriation by the state, in order to control nomadic populations) throughout the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.¹² To put an end to this enumeration, a brotherhood that was to play a major role in the seventeenth century was the Hâlvetîs, also of an urban and artisanal background: many Hâlvetî sheikhs (of the Balkans) originated as simple artisans.¹³ By the end of the sixteenth century, they had gained access to the higher echelons of power: Şeyh Şücâ' (d. 1582), Murad III's spiritual counselor and dream inter-

lendirilmesi”, unpublished MA thesis, Kırıkkale University 2004; cf. I. Tamdoğan-Abel, “Le futur dans le *Rumuz-i kunuz* de Mejdeddin Ibn Isa: une utopie, une prophétie, un livre à mystères”, in Clayer, Popovic and Zarccone (eds), *Melâmîs – Bayrâmîs*, 145–152; M. Sariyannis, “Knowledge and Control of the Future in Ottoman Thought”, *Acâ'ib: Occasional papers on the Ottoman perceptions of the supernatural* 1 (2020), 49–84 at 67–70.

- 10 Yavuz, “The Making of a Sufi Order”, 174–180; Eadem, “The Cyclical Time and *Burûz* (Projection) of the Saint: Thematic Connections in the Early Modern Islamic Landscape”, *Journal of Early Modern History* 24 (2020), 136–161; Eadem, “From the *Hamzaviyye* to the *Melâmîyye*: Transformation of an Order in Seventeenth-century Istanbul”, in V. Erginbaş (ed.), *New Perspectives on Ottoman Sunnism* (Edinburgh 2020), 121–145 at 130–131 (on a mid-seventeenth century effort to make this idea more orthodox); I. Mélikoff, *Sur les traces du soufisme turc. Recherches sur l'islam populaire en Anatolie* (Istanbul 1992), 30, 68–69.
- 11 A. Y. Ocak, *Osmanlı toplumunda zındıklar ve mülhidler (15.-17. yüzyıllar)* (Istanbul 1998), 134–135; S. Karahüseyin, “Bektaşîlik geleneğine Hurufî bir dokunuş: Nesîmî örneği”, *IV. Türkiye Lisansüstü Çalışmaları Kongresi – Bildiriler Kitabı IV* (Istanbul 2015), 233–252. Melâmîs were also influenced by Hurufism: see F. B. Yavuz, “Orality in the *Tekke* and the Circulation of ‘High’ and ‘Low’ Cultures of Sufism in Seventeenth-Century Istanbul”, *History of Religions* 62/1 (2022), 49–72 at 63–64.
- 12 Ocak, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğunda marjinal Sûflîlik: Kalenderîler (XIV.-XVII. yüzyıllar)* (Ankara 1992), 205–215.
- 13 N. Clayer, *Mystiques, état et société. Les Hâlvetîs dans l'aire balkanique de la fin du XVI^e siècle à nos jours* (Leiden 1994), 145–146. This seems to have changed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when the sheikhs' post became more of hereditary or, alternatively, open to the ulema and to members of the military or the administrative class (ibid., 241–243).

preter was after all a *Ḥalvetī* sheikh, although one most *Ḥalvetīs* found difficult to endorse.¹⁴

I. The Salafi reaction: *Ḳāḏızādelis*, *Ḥalvetīs*, *Naḳşibendīs* and the supernatural in everyday life

The intellectual landscape, at least in Istanbul and arguably other large cities, changed considerably in the following centuries. For one thing, even if we accept that “lettrist imperialism” had prevailed in the palace and elite circles throughout the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, it seems to have completely ebbed away by the early seventeenth century. Beginning with *Kâtib Çelebi* (d. 1657), *Ibn Khaldūn*’s rationalist sociology, deeply hostile to such ideas, gradually assumed command of the worldview of the elite. Its approach to the problems of the empire did not allow for much reliance on divination or lettrist protection (still, this did not apply to astrology, which continued to flourish in the palace and found a great advocate in *Muṣṭafā Na’īmā* (d. 1716), chief expounder of *Ibn Khaldūn*’s theories).¹⁵

Already in the first half of the seventeenth century, large segments of urban society had begun to take sides in what has been named the *Ḳāḏızādeli* debate. In very short words, the *Ḳāḏızādelis* were the followers of *Mehmed Ḳāḏızāde* (d. 1635), a preacher in the steps of *Mehmed Birgivi*’s (d. 1573) “fundamentalist” opposition of the mid-sixteenth century who struggled against a series of “innovations” including the dancing rituals of certain Sufi orders. Their primary targets were the *Ḥalvetī* sheikhs, starting with *Ḳāḏızāde*’s archenemy ‘*Abdūlmecīd*

14 J. J. Curry, *The Transformation of Muslim Mystical Thought in the Ottoman Empire: The Rise of the Ḥalvetī Order, 1350–1650* (Edinburgh 2010), 279. See also D. Le Gall, *A Culture of Sufism: Naqshbandīs in the Ottoman World, 1450–1700* (Albany 2005), 57.

15 M. Sariyannis, “Ottoman Ibn Khaldunism Revisited: The Pre-Tanzimat Reception of the *Muqaddima*, from *Kinalizade* to *Şanizade*”, in M. Sariyannis (ed.), *Political Thought and Practice in the Ottoman Empire. Halcyon Days in Crete IX: A Symposium Held in Rethymno, 9–11 January 2015* (Rethymno 2019), 251–286. On *Ibn Khaldun* as an opponent of occultism see M. Melvin-Koushki, “In Defense of Geomancy: Şaraf al-Dīn Yazdī Rebuts *Ibn Ḥaldūn*’s Critique of the Occult Sciences”, *Arabica* 64/3–4 (2017), 346–403; N. Gardiner, *Ibn Khaldūn versus the Occultists in Barqūq’s Court: The Critique of Lettrism in al-Muqaddimah* (Berlin 2020). On *Na’īmā*’s astrological interests see Sariyannis, “Knowledge and Control of the Future”, 79; G. Şen, “Das Ereignis von Edirne (1703). Astrologie as Strategie zur Herrschaftlegitimation und Kontingenzbewältigung”, *Das Mittelalter* 20/1 (2015), 115–138.

Sivāsī (d. 1639). The Ḥalvetīs took up the challenge and emerged as their main opponents although they often shared similar ideas on various matters; the Mevlevīs were also targeted, due to their rituals considered as innovations.¹⁶ The Kāḏızādelis themselves never denied Sufism wholesale; they were associated with orders such as the Naqşibendīs (Naqshbendīs), who by that time had established themselves in the Ottoman towns,¹⁷ despite the reputation of the latter as defenders of Ibn Arabī well into the seventeenth century.¹⁸

The question remains as to what happened to occultism in these debates. Birgivī had been adamant in rejecting magic (*sibr*) as one of the seven grave offences, among murder or taking of interest. Furthermore, he rejected Sufi claims of “seeing [heavenly] lights and having visions of great prophets”, arguing that no miracle-worker should be credited access to supernatural power unless the true believer has checked “how he behaves in terms of commanding [right]

16 A Mevlevī-Ḥalvetī cooperation can be documented in many ways, see e.g. Curry, *The Transformation*, 134–136; A. Gürbüz, “Bilingual Heaven: Was There a Distinct Persianate Islam in the Early Modern Ottoman Empire?”, *Philological Encounters* 6 (2021), 214–241.

17 Le Gall, *A Culture of Sufism*, 150–156; Eadem, “Kāḏızādelis, Naqshbendis, and Intra-Sufi Diatribe in Seventeenth-Century Istanbul”, *Turkish Studies Association Bulletin* 28 (2004), 1–28; I. Weismann, *The Naqshbandiyya: Orthodoxy and Activism in a Worldwide Sufi Tradition* (London 2007), 134–135; M. Sheikh, *Ottoman Puritanism and its Discontents: Ahmad al-Rūmī al-Āqhişārī and the Qāḏızādelis*, Oxford 2016, 56–66; M. Gel, “Debating Sufi Knowledge in the Eighteenth-Century Ottoman Thought”, 141–144; B. Tezcan, “The Portrait of the Preacher as a Young Man: Two Autobiographical Letters by Kāḏızāde Meḥmed from the Early Seventeenth Century”, in Sariyannis (ed.), *Political Thought and Practice*, 187–250 at 230. The eponymous hero of the movement, Kāḏızāde Meḥmed, seems to have had Naqşibendī allegiances (ibid., 202). On the introduction and establishment of the Naqşibendī order in the Ottoman Empire see Weismann, *The Naqshbandiyya*, 44–47, 73–78; B. Abu-Manneh, “The Naqshbandiyya-Mujaddidiyya in the Ottoman Lands in the Early Nineteenth Century”, *Die Welt des Islams* 22/1 (1982), 1–36; M. Gaborieau, A. Popovic and T. Zarcone (eds), *Naqshbandis. Cheminements et situation actuelle d’un ordre mystique musulman* (Istanbul and Paris 1990); Le Gall, *A Culture of Sufism*.

18 Le Gall, *A Culture of Sufism*, 93, 112, 123–127; P. Bruckmayr, “The Particular Will (*al-irādāt al-juziyya*): Excavations Regarding a Latecomer in Kalām Terminology on Human Agency and its Position in Naqshbandi Discourse”, *European Journal of Turkish Studies* 13 (2011) <http://journals.openedition.org/ejts/4601>, 13. Naqşibendīs would also be very critical against the Kāḏızādelis’ attack against tomb veneration (Le Gall, *A Culture of Sufism*, 120–121, 153) and the famous Naqşibendī sheikh ‘Abd al-Ġani al-Nābulūsī (d. 1731) had defended smoking (J. Grehan, “Smoking and ‘Early Modern’ Sociability: The Great Tobacco Debate in the Ottoman Middle East (Seventeenth to Eighteenth Centuries)”, *American Historical Review* 111 (2006), 1352–1377 at 1355–1356 and 1369–1372).

and forbidding [wrong], guarding the *hudud* and carrying out the law”.¹⁹ Followers of the Kādızādeli movement were much more vehement against such claims: thus, Ahmed Aḳḳisārī (d. 1632) argued that “unnatural events” may often be false miracles produced by the Satan (*istidrāc*).²⁰ What the Kādızādelis actually achieved, in some respects reminiscent of Protestant attacks against miracle-working in contemporaneous Europe, was a banishment of the supernatural from the present and from everyday life. Miracles were performed by the Prophet, a millennium ago and in Hijaz; there was very little probability for a miracle to be seen in the present century.²¹ A parallel to European Puritanism can be drawn;²² in both cases, scholastic discourse was criticised for unduly engaging human mind and experimental knowledge with useful ends was praised, as each individual should discover the essentials of faith favouring orthopraxy rather than orthodoxy.²³ This non-scholastic naturalism, as termed by Harun Küçük,²⁴ was accessible to and indeed practiced by large urban strata, offering a thriving alternative to esoteric and occultist interpretations of the world. It is probably no coincidence that Naḳḣibendī, the Kādızādelis’ Sufi (even occasional) allies gave little importance to miracle-working, stating that a saint’s true function would be observing the law and attracting people to the

19 K. A. Ivanyi, *Virtue, Piety and the Law: A Study of Birgivi Mehmed Efendi’s al-Ṭarīqa al-muḥammadiyya* (Leiden 2020), 126–129.

20 Sheikh, *Ottoman Puritanism*, 73–76. But the same formulation could also be used by a contemporaneous Ḥalvetī sheikh to defend true Sufi miracles: Curry, *The Transformation*, 211.

21 For some implications of this development see M. Sariyannis, “The Limits of Going Global: The Case of ‘Ottoman Enlightenment(s)’”, *History Compass* 2020;18:e12623. <https://doi.org/10.1111/hic3.12623>; Tezcan, “The Portrait of the Preacher”, 237–241. On the discussion on “Islamic/Ottoman Enlightenment”, apart from the literature cited in these papers, see also T. Artan, “El yazmaları ışığında bir çevre ve çehre eskizi: Kadızādeliler, Müceddidiler ve Damad İbrahim Paşa (1730)”, *Müteferrika* 50 (2016/2), 51–143 esp. 58–88.

22 M. Sariyannis, “The Kādızādeli Movement as a Social and Political Phenomenon: The Rise of a ‘Mercantile Ethic’?”, in A. Anastasopoulos (ed.), *Political Initiatives From the Bottom-Up in the Ottoman Empire. (Halcyon Days in Crete VII. A Symposium Held in Rethymno, 9–11 January 2009)* (Rethymno 2012), 263–289 at 282–289; idem (with a chapter by E. Tuşalp Atiyas), *A History of Ottoman Political Thought up to the Early Nineteenth Century* (Leiden 2019), 300–301.

23 Cf. B. H. Küçük, “The Compass and the Astrolabe: Empiricism in the Ottoman Empire”, in Seyfi Kenan – Selçuk Akşin Somel (eds), *Dimensions of Transformation in the Ottoman Empire from the Late Medieval Age to Modernity* (Leiden 2021), 257–284.

24 *Ibid.*, 275.

right path (although, as all Sufi orders indeed, they too maintained that it was possible to communicate with the *‘ālam al-ghayb*).²⁵

Such a denial of easy access to the supernatural must inevitably have had an impact on esoteric beliefs and practices and acceptance of them. It has been remarked that by the end of the eighteenth century even Sufi sheikhs, and not only those of the Naqşibendî order, had ceased to claim miracles and knowledge of the hidden world.²⁶ And this was broadened among the Ḥalvetîs, the Kâdızâdelis’ prime adversaries: in an early eighteenth-century biography of Ḥalvetî sheikhs, we read of a saint who “did not like miracles that broke the custom” (*iẓbâr-ı bark-ı ‘ade kerâmeti sevmez idi*).²⁷ İsmâ‘il Haqqı Bursevî (d. 1725), a member of the Celvetî order (derived from and similar to the Ḥalvetîs), explains at length that miracles of knowledge (*al-karamât al-‘ilmîyya*) are superior to miracles of this cosmic world (*al-karamât al-kawnîyya*); because the former are related to the essence and names of God, whereas no good comes from the latter.²⁸ Melâmî-Bayrâmî sheikhs also had an unfavorable attitude toward miracles and demonstration of extraordinary powers already by the mid-seventeenth century.²⁹

On the other hand, it would be a gross exaggeration to state that under the influence of the Kâdızâdelis occultism and the supernatural were banned from Ottoman culture in the seventeenth century. On the contrary, a striking example of occultism alive and kicking can be seen in the case of Niyâzî-i Mısrî (d. 1694). Niyâzî, a Ḥalvetî sheikh whose visionary and passionate politics saw him banished repeatedly to Limnos, wrote a number of works among which is an

25 Le Gall, *A Culture of Sufism*, 120–123; Weismann, *The Naqshbandiyya*, 59–60.

26 C. Mayeur-Jaouen, “The Small World of Aḥmad al-Şawî (1761–1825), an Egyptian Khalwatî Sheikh”, in R. Elger – M. Kemper (eds), *The Piety of Learning: Islamic Studies in Honor of Stefan Reichmuth*, (Leiden 2017), 105–144 at 125–127.

27 Enfi Hasan Hulûs Halvetî, “Tezkiretü’l-müteahhirîn”: XVI.-XVIII. asırlarda İstanbul velileri ve delileri, eds. M. Tatçı – M. Yıldız (Istanbul 2007), 83.

28 İsmâil Hakki Bursevî, *Tamâmü’l-feyz fi bâbî’r-ricâl: Atpazarî Kutup Osman Efendi menâkıbı* (İnceleme – Çeviri – Tıpkıbasım), eds R. Muslu – A. Namlı (Istanbul 2020), 213–214; cf. *ibid.*, 96, 231–232. This distinction comes back to Ibn Arabi and other medieval mystics: E. Geoffroy, “Attitudes contrastées des mystiques musulmans face au miracle”, in D. Aigle (ed.), *Miracle et karâma. Hagiographies médiévales comparées* (Turnhout 2000), 301–316 at 311–313.

29 A. Erken, “A Historical Analysis of Melâmî-Bayrâmî Hagiographies”, unpublished M.A. thesis, Boğaziçi University 2009, 68–69.

impressive diary full of esoteric calculations and prophecies based on the science of letters and numbers.³⁰ Notably, Niyāzî's sworn enemies seem to have been not only Vanî Efendi, the champion of the Kâdızâdeli movement at the time, but also the Melâmî-Bayrâmî Sufis.³¹ Apparently this hostility had nothing to do with the presence of the supernatural in everyday life, as (partly) in the case of the Hâlvetîs vs. the Kâdızâdelis and/or Nağşibendîs, but rather (if we choose to see it in these terms) with conflicting claims to a privileged access (and, thus, mediation) to the supernatural. The two orders may have also had different preferred ways to communicate with the hidden world: we know that Hâlvetîs were partial to dream interpretation and visionary manifestations, as illustrated in the example of the infamous Şeyh Şüca'î.³² The Bayrâmîs, on the other hand, had led the way in the lettrist understanding of the world throughout the sixteenth century (as exemplified in the example of Sarūhānî, father and son); the prominent Bayrâmî-Melâmî sheikh Oğlan Şeyh İbrahim (d. 1655) specifically states that Bayrâmîs did not prefer dream interpretation, regularly practiced by the Hâlvetîs.³³ Further research might perhaps reveal whether Hâlvetî and their branches developed their own revelatory path, harnessing dreams and visions to access the supernatural, in an effort to compete with the Bayrâmîs' more mechanical ways of using alphanumerical methods and a lettrist view of the world.

30 H. Çeçen (ed.), *Niyâzî-i Mısırî'nin hatıraları* (Istanbul 2006). Cf. D. Terzioglu, "Sufi and Dissident in the Ottoman Empire: Niyâzî-i Mısırî (1618–1694)", unpublished PhD diss., Harvard University 1999; Eadem, "Man in the Image of God in the Image of the Times: Sufi Self-Narratives and the Diary of Niyâzî-i Mısırî (1618–94)", *Studia Islamica* 94 (2002), 139–165; Sariyannis, "Knowledge and Control of the Future", 70–71.

31 On the complex relationship of the Bayrâmî-Melâmî order with other Sufi paths see Erken, "A Historical Analysis", 76–105.

32 See also C. Kafadar, *Asiye Hatun: Rüya mektupları* (Istanbul 1994) = idem, "Müteredditt Bir Mutasavvıf: Üsküplü Asiye Hatun'un Rüya Defteri 1641–1643" in idem, *Kim var imiş biz burada yoğ iken. Dört Osmanlı: Yeniçeri, Tüccar, Derviş ve Hatun* (Istanbul 2010), 123–191.

33 B. C. Deveci, "Sun'ullāh Ğaybî - Şoḥbetnâme (İnceleme – Metin – Dizin)", unpublished MA thesis, Sivas Cumhuriyet Üniversitesi 2020, 154–157; Erken, "A Historical Analysis", 60; Yavuz, "Orality in the *Tekke*", 66fn60. Still, Nev'izâde 'Aṭâ'î (d. 1637), whose collection of biographies is full of dreams and their interpretation, seems to have been affiliated to the Bayrâmî-Melâmî order: A. Niyazioğlu, *Dreams and Lives in Ottoman Istanbul: A Seventeenth-Century Biographer's Perspective* (London 2017), 34–35. Other Bayrâmî sheikhs who interpreted dreams or had their own dreams interpreted include Akşemseddin (d. 1459), Yâvsi (d. 1514), Hacı Efendi (d. 1537 or 1538) (ibid., 7, 35, 95 and 99–100)—all belonging to the period before the mid-sixteenth century.

Nevertheless, practices were to become quite mixed across Sufi allegiances in the centuries to follow, as exemplified by Niyāzī's self-fashioned lettrist or rather numerical sort of divination.

Now, how can we establish any correspondence of these currents with social groups? Elsewhere I have argued that the *Ḳāḏızādelis*, especially during their "second wave" in the 1650s that mobilised significant urban crowds, relied on middle and upper mercantile strata, the "people of the market" but also (and mainly) those designed as "profiteering merchants".³⁴ This is why they seem not to have rejected interest-taking, contrary to their mentor Birgivī, following more generally a free-trade approach that favored aspiring upcomers at the expense of more traditional petty tradesmen organised in guilds.³⁵ *Naḳṣibendīs*, the single Sufi fraternity most friendly disposed toward the *Ḳāḏızādelis*, may have begun their Ottoman life as an ulema and bureaucrat order (the lack of merchants in a mid-sixteenth century list of *waqf* founders is striking³⁶) but seem to have evolved quickly to a predominantly merchant brotherhood. To quote Baki Tezcan,

The cash *waqfs* established to support *Naḳṣibendi* institutions would have financed craftsmen and small businessmen who had to compete with their peers who enjoyed a connection with the Janissary corps and were thus able to borrow from their 'Common Bank'. It is also not difficult to imagine that those who would borrow from the *Naḳṣibendi* cash *waqfs* could grow sympathetic towards the *Naḳṣibendi* order and eventually contribute to the social base of the *Ḳāḏızādelis*, one of whose targets in the seventeenth century were the Janissaries, who not only enjoyed the financial resources of their bank but also privileged positions in trade and guilds, and thus made it difficult for others in the world of small business to make a place for themselves.³⁷

Their main precepts, *ḥalvet der encümen* (solitude within society) and *sefer der vaṭan* (journeying within the homeland, as opposed to seeking spiritual enlightenment in faraway lands),³⁸ was well suited to the mercantile ethos. Thus,

34 Sariyannis, "The *Ḳāḏızādeli* Movement".

35 Ibid., 282–289.

36 Le Gall, *A Culture of Sufism*, 59. The *Naḳṣibendīs* were also in a certain degree "the order of the ulema" (Le Gall, *A Culture of Sufism*, 55ff.).

37 Tezcan, "The Portrait of the Preacher", 233.

38 Weismann, *The Naqshbandiyya*, 27–28; Le Gall, *A Culture of Sufism*, 119; Sheikh, *Ottoman Puritanism*, 62–63.

especially after the Mujaddidī reform by Ahmad Sirhindī (d. 1624), which emphasised orthodoxy substituting Ibn Arabī's unity of existence with "unity of perception" (*waḥdat al-shuhūd*),³⁹ it is not surprising that, in Tūlay Artan's words,

In the later eighteenth century both sufis and *ulema* seem to have been using Sirhindī's ideas to underpin their initiatives. Included in their agenda were elements pointing towards land privatization, a locally commercialized and monetized economy, the formation of a new and more capitalistic urban elite, and the progressive reintegration of the provinces into a recentralized political order.⁴⁰

On the other hand, the H̄alvetīs of the same period seem to have been associated with the janissaries, then emerging as a mixture of newcomers to the guild system and a refuge for what Cemal Kafadar has called the *lumpenesnaf*, the lower strata of artisans and petty tradesmen. In some sources, such as the now well-known diary of Seyyid Hasan, a Sünbülī (a H̄alvetī branch) dervish from the 1660s, their ranks include merchants and artisans, as well as low-to-mid-level members of the military.⁴¹ The lower merchant and artisan class seems to have supplied followers to various *tariqas* that were often in conflict with each other: so the Bayrāmī-Melāmī (often known as H̄amzevī after 1561), heirs to the rich lettrist tradition of the sixteenth century and chief target of many H̄alvetī

39 See e.g. Weismann, *The Naqshbandiyya*, 49–63.

40 T. Artan, "Forms and Forums of Expression: Istanbul and Beyond, 1600–1800", in Ch. Woodhead (ed.), *The Ottoman World* (London 2012), 378–406 at 380. On the non-Mujaddidī branches of the Naqshibendī who continued their activities in the Ottoman Empire see A. Papas, "Refonder plutôt que réformer : la Naqshbandiyya non-mujaddidī dans le monde turc (xvi^e-xviii^e siècle). Lecture de trois textes naqshbandī kâsânī", in R. Chih – C. Mayeur-Jaouen (eds), *Le soufisme à l'époque ottoman, xvi^e-xviii^e siècle* (Cairo 2010), 235–248.

41 Kafadar, "Self and Others: The Diary of a Dervish in Seventeenth Century Istanbul and First-person Narratives in Ottoman Literature", *Studia Islamica* 69 (1989), 121–150; Sariyannis, "The K̄ādzādeli Movement", 279. The full text of the diary was transliterated recently in two unpublished MA theses, both submitted to Marmara University: A. Can, "Seyyid Hasan, *Sohbetnâme*, I. cilt (1071–1072/1660–1661) (inceleme – metin)", 2015; A. Akkılık, "Seyyid Hasan'ın günlüğü, II. cilt (H. 1073–1075/M. 1662–1664)", 2019. A detailed study is still pending and would reveal a lot more about the social basis of the mid-seventeenth century H̄alvetīs.

sheikhs, whose social basis was distinctly mercantile and artisanal.⁴² The Bayrāmī-Melāmī is one of the few brotherhoods for which we have specific information about its sheikhs and prominent members regarding their craft and occupation, and these were more often than not artisanal.⁴³ Melāmīs had been criticising Sufis living on alms for decades, and they were promoting the idea that one should earn one's own livelihood.⁴⁴ For instance, this is how Sarı Abdullah (d. 1660) explains the need for choosing *melāmet* or reproach (by the common folk), i.e. in this context (as put by Betül Yavuz) "working manually to make a living in the marketplace rather than relying on the comforts of a convent":

In choosing *melāmet*, [the first Bayrāmīs'] intent was not to commit illicit acts. It was rather that they were inclined to occupy themselves with buying and selling, earning and making a living without a Sufi scarf and cloak.⁴⁵

The same applies for the Mevlevīs (also associated with janissaries like the Hālvetīs,⁴⁶ but closely allied to the Bayrāmīs as well⁴⁷); a short catechism authored by the famous İsmā'īl 'Ankaravī (d. 1631) asserts that

42 Ocak, *Zındıklar ve mülbidler*, 256–258; Sariyannis, "The Kādızādeli Movement", 279–280. On the role of seventeenth-century Bayrāmīs in defending Ibn Arabi against the Kādızādeli attacks see A. E. Özkul – S. Ilić, "Ibn Arabi, Malami-Bayrāmī Dervish Order and the 17th Century Ottoman Balkans", *Journal of History Culture and Art Research* 6/6 (2017), 328–335.

43 So Abdurrahman Askeri, the biographer of Pir Ali Aksarayı (d. 1539), a shop-owner; Aḥmed Edirnevi, Pir Ali's possible successor, a shoemaker; their adherents were specifically *ehl-i dükkân ve ehl-i hıref*; Gazanfer Dede (d. 1566/7) was a tanner; Hasan Kabaduz of Bursa (d. 1601/2) a tailor; Idris-i Muḥtefî (d. 1615) was a famously rich merchant and his closest disciples came from the guilds of craftsmen; Hacı Bayram Kabayî (d. 1626) a seller of cloths (Yavuz, "The Making of a Sufi Order", 90, 91n242, 97, 122, 131, 134–135 and 137–138, 153).

44 D. Terzioğlu, "Sunna-Minded Sufi Preachers in Service of the Ottoman State: The *Naşihat-nâme* of Hasan Addressed to Murad IV", *Archivum Ottomanicum* 27 (2010), 241–312 at 280–281; Erken, "A Historical Analysis", 55–56.

45 Yavuz, "From the *Hamzaviyye* to the *Melâmiyye*", 132–133. The accusation against Sufis of living on alms was a commonplace in various Ottoman moralist and political treatises.

46 Already in 1598 the janissary scribe adheres to the brotherhood and founds a tekke, in whose inauguration pashas and the janissary agha were present: Selânikî Mustafâ Efendi, *Târih-i Selânikî*, M. İpşirli (ed.) (Ankara 1999), 730.

47 Niyazioğlu, *Dreams and Lives*, 100. Let us note here that Mevlevî texts were central for the Nakşibendīs as well.

the masters have not allowed the devotees or traders the right to divorce their wives for reasons of commerce or of their craft. They have ordained to the initiated to work according to their capacities, so that the divine work and concrete existence coexist. They have considered being idle a dishonest thing, and so have ordained that every initiated earns his livelihood from his work.⁴⁸

Indeed, the usual connection of Mevlevīs to the higher echelons of society seems to correspond to a later stage of their history, well into the eighteenth century. The historian Silāhdār Mehmet Ağa mentions the chief astrologer Derviş Aḥmed Efendi's adhesion to the brotherhood in 1686 as a remarkable gossip.⁴⁹

However, we must be very cautious in making these generalisations and in insisting in a one-two-one correspondence of Sufi brotherhoods with social groups. For one thing, Niyāzī-i Mīṣrī accuses the Ḥamzevīs (Bayrāmī-Melāmī) for dominating the royal court in the end of the seventeenth century.⁵⁰ Indeed, Idrīs-i Muḥtefī's (d. 1615) successor, Sarı Abdullah (d. 1665), was a courtier of kingly descent from the Maghrib and was raised by his uncle, the Grand Vizier Halil Pasha; his courtly and ulema connections must have played a pivotal role in the order's new visibility and status.⁵¹ The Ḥamzevī sheikhs of the late seventeenth century were often high-ranked ulemas and it appears that they did indeed infiltrate the higher echelons of power by the early eighteenth century.⁵² Thus, it seems indeed that the Bayrāmī-Melāmī order had acquired a higher social status by the mid-seventeenth century, leaving the lower *esnaf* to the various branches of the Ḥalvetī and Mevlevī brotherhoods. Another cautionary remark here should be that the Melāmī in general were what Victoria Rowe Holbrook described as a "supra-order", in the sense that "they are said to begin where sufi orders leave off": a Melāmī could also belong to another brotherhood and declare allegiance to a Melāmī sheikh.⁵³ After all, the conflict between Melāmīs

48 A. F. Ambrosio, "Ecrire et décrire la confrérie Mevleviyye entre le XVI^e et le XVII^e siècle", in Chih – Mayeur-Jaouen (eds), *Le soufisme à l'époque ottoman*, 275–290 at 289.

49 Silahdar Findıklılı Mehmed Ağa, *Silāhdār Tarihi*, A. Refik ed., 2 vols (İstanbul 1928), 2:244.

50 Terzioğlu, "Sufi and Dissident", 338–339.

51 Yavuz, "The Making of a Sufi Order", 139–145; Erken, "A Historical Analysis", 20–22.

52 Yavuz, "The Making of a Sufi Order", 156–157; Eadem, "From the *Hamzaviyye* to the *Melāmiyye*", 124; Niyazioğlu, *Dreams and Lives*, 44n89.

53 Holbrook, "Ibn 'Arabi and Ottoman Dervish Traditions".

and Ḥalvetīs should not be taken at face value, since it was often personified in individual controversies (as in the cases of the Ḥalvetī figures of Sivāsī or Niyāzī-i Mısırī, for example). The example of the famous Melāmī sheikh Oğlan Şeyh İbrahim Efendi (d. 1655) is telling: he had only positive things to say of the Ḥalvetīs, and many Ḥalvetī sheikhs (including Sivāsī) had only nice words to say of him.⁵⁴

In the light of these observations, one might suggest, in simplified terms, a pattern as follows: on the one hand, there are different Ḥalvetī (and Ḥalvetī-affiliated branches) or Bayrāmī fraternities (not to forget the Mevlevīs) in contestation over the esoteric content of the world, where sainthood and various occult methods of manipulation (from *cifr* and letter magic to geomancy) are commonly accepted as facts. On the other hand, the Ḳāḏızādeli masses and perhaps more generally the Naḳşibendī order were promoting a less esoteric, more pietistic vision of the world, where what counted was piety and religious fervor, rather than direct mediation of the supernatural forces. Among these two roughly defined sides, the former seems to have relied on large segments of the lower artisanal classes, in general within the guild system, whereas the latter expressed an upcoming class of merchants with a more “bourgeois” spirit. A parallel to the Protestant-Calvinist tendency for non-esoteric interpretation of the world would not be out of place here.

II. Ishrāqī/Illuminationist beliefs and revealed knowledge

While the urban masses rallied around either Ḳāḏızādeli preachers or Ḥalvetī sheikhs, scholarly circles seem to have eagerly endorsed al-Suhrawardī’s Illuminationism. Refined by Shams al-Din al-Shahrazūrī (d. after 1288), Shihab al-Din al-Suhrawardī (d. 1191)’s natural philosophy gave a primordial importance to light, varying intensities of which produce the array of phenomena from immaterial entities down to material bodies; in the same vein, it is light and its perception by varying degrees of human vision that produce knowledge of the world, through (in al-Shahrazūrī’s formulation) the “world of images” (‘ālam-i *miṣāl*), a sphere of existence similar to Plato’s archetypes, whence mystic visions

54 Yavuz, “Orality in the *Tekke*”, 61; B. Kemikli (ed.), *Oğlanlar Şeyhi İbrahim: Müfid ü muhtasar* (Istanbul 2003), 142–144. Cf. similar writings by another prominent Bayrāmī figure, Sarı Abdullah (d. 1660): Yavuz, “From the *Hamzaviyye* to the *Melāmīyye*”, 128, 133.

and miracles originate.⁵⁵ Furthermore, Illuminationist (*ishrāqī*) philosophy created a genealogy of revelatory knowledge of hermetic nature, attributing all esoteric (and, in some degree, exoteric) knowledge to the ancient sages (including the Greek philosophers⁵⁶ and Hermes⁵⁷) and being skeptical toward the exploration of the world through reason.⁵⁸

Ishrāqī thought entered the Ottoman realm relatively early, for instance in the works of Mollā Luṭfī (d. 1495).⁵⁹ It was perceived as a tradition of wisdom (*ḥikma*) beginning with Hermes, Pythagoras and Plato (rather than al-Suhrawardī), a concept initiated by al-Shahrazūrī, in quite a few authors of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, such as Musannifak (d. 1470) and others.⁶⁰ By the seventeenth century, it had become the favourite philosophical tradition of the Ottoman ulema, such as Mehmet Emin Şirvanī (d. 1626; an Iranian scholar who fled his native town to become a major figure in the Ottoman religious-educational establishment) and, perhaps even more so, of the new stratum of intellectuals that grew outside the *medrese* tradition, like Kâtib Çelebi or Münecimbaşı Ahmed Dede (d. 1702).⁶¹ Even popular literature was early to

55 L. W. C. van Lit, *The World of Image in Islamic Philosophy: Ibn Sīnā, Suhrawardī, Shahrāzūrī, and Beyond* (Edinburgh 2017).

56 Notably Plato, considered the dean of ancient Illuminationists, whereas Aristotle was the dean of ancient Peripatetics/philosophers. This distinction begins perhaps with al-Jurjanī (d. 1413); see M. Arıcı, “Is it Possible to Speak of an Illuminationist Circle in the Ottoman Scholarly World? An Analysis of the Ottoman Scholarly Conception of Illuminationism”, *Nazariyat* 4/3 (2018), 1–48 at 14.

57 On Islamic Hermes and Hermeticism see the now classic study by K. van Bladel, *The Arabic Hermes: from Pagan Sage to Prophet of Science* (Oxford 2009).

58 I am trying to analyse this aspect in a paper titled “Sources and Traditions of Knowledge: Revelation, Hermeticism, Reasoning in an Ottoman Context”, to be published in the proceedings of the Halcyon Days XI International Symposium “Enchantments and disenchantments: early modern Ottoman visions of the world” (Rethymno, 14–17 January 2022).

59 Arıcı, “Is it Possible to Speak of an Illuminationist Circle”, 29–30; M. Kurz, *Ways to Heaven, Gates to Hell: Fazlīzāde ‘Alī’s Struggle with the Diversity of Ottoman Islam* (Berlin 2011), 237–243.

60 Arıcı, “Is it Possible to Speak of an Illuminationist Circle”, 25.

61 G. Hagen, *Ein osmanischer Geograph bei der Arbeit. Entstehung und Gedankenwelt von Kâtib Celebis Gihannüma* (Berlin 2003), 44–46; Kurz, *Ways to Heaven*, 203–209; Arıcı, “Is it Possible to Speak of an Illuminationist Circle”, 19–20; İ. Kömbe, “Münecimbaşı Ahmed Dede’nin ahlāk düşüncesi: Meşşâî felsefe ile Tasavvufî düşüncüyü İşrâkî hikmette sentezleme”, *Nazariyat* 7 (2021), 149–174.

incorporate Illuminationist philosophy: one of the first instances can be found in a peculiar text known as *Hızırnâme* and composed in 1476 by Şeyh Mehmed Çelebi (d. 1493/4), which describes the travels of a dervish through the terrestrial and celestial worlds.⁶² From among the Sufi world, it seems Mevlevî sheikhs were principal actors in spreading Illuminationism, if we judge from İsmâ'îl 'Ankaravî (d. 1631), author of the first Turkish commentary of al-Suhrawardî's magnum opus, who considered Mevlana's *Mesnevî* a representation of primordial wisdom or *hikma*.⁶³ On the other hand, Halvetîs and their parent branches were rather skeptical. For instance, İsmâ'îl Hakkî Bursevî, the early-eighteenth century Celvetî sheikh, opposes the Illuminationist to the Sufi path and dismisses the Illuminationists' claim to *hikma*: because they value abstract thought (*fikr-i mücerred*) over God's remembrance (*zîkr*), "the line of annulment has been drawn over the pages of their unveilings".⁶⁴

Illuminationist philosophy, with its tendency to attribute knowledge (and, in fact, its own genealogy) to ancient wisdom, must have played a crucial role in the spread of Hermetic beliefs in the Ottoman world; by this, I mean not the *corpus Hermeticum* itself, but the idea of Hermes as a keeper and transmitter of ancient knowledge.⁶⁵ In this context, it should come as no surprise that an emphasis on the precept that knowledge, particularly esoteric knowledge, should be kept for the few elect, is evident in authors associated with *Isbrâqî* thought. A story about how Aristotle decided to make wisdom so difficult to grasp that only those fit will comprehend it, in order not to disclose its secrets, runs all the way from Taşköprüzâde Ahmed Efendi's (d. 1561) encyclopaedia⁶⁶ to Nev'î's (d. 1599) vernacular counterpart, *Netâ'icü'l-fünûn* ("The Yield of the Disciplines"):

62 Sibel Kocaer highlights some of the structural elements of this work that imply a knowledge of al-Suhrawardî's philosophy in her thesis: "The journey of an Ottoman warrior dervish: The *Hızırname* (Book of Khidr), sources and reception", unpublished PhD thesis, SOAS, University of London 2015, 161–167. Other examples of Illuminationist influence are the references to the realm of images or *'âlem-i mişâl* (ibid., 271).

63 Kurz, *Ways to Heaven*, 203–204; Gürbüz, "Bilingual Heaven", 231–232; Arıcı, "Is it Possible to Speak of an Illuminationist Circle", 38–40.

64 Kurz, *Ways to Heaven*, 212.

65 Cf. van Bladel, *The Arabic Hermes*, 223–229.

66 Tashkupri-zadah, *Miftâh as-Sa'âdah wa misbâh as-siyâdah fi mawdu'ât al-ulûm*, by Ahmad b. Mustafa (Tashkupri-zadah), ed. Kamil Bakry and Abdalwahhab Abu'l-Nur (Cairo 1968), v. 1, 314–316.

Before [Aristotle] the art of philosophy had not been written down; there existed [only] some scattered treatises in the form of hints, allusions, signs, and riddles because the forefathers did not impart philosophical knowledge and other hidden sciences... to anyone who was not a philosopher. Knowledge was passed on by inheritance and not by study. When they put this matter to Plato, Plato asked... “Do you want to publicise secret matters of wisdom so that the uneducated (*cübelâ*) get to know the secret knowledge of the wise?” Aristotle said: “I will do it in such a way that the unexplained meaning will not be obvious to the uninitiated (*nâ-maḥrem*)”.⁶⁷

The same story can be found in Ömer Karakaşzâde (d. 1637), who adds extensive allusions both to Illuminationism and to Hermes and Idris, and in Kâtib Çelebi's entry on Aristotle from a biographical dictionary, *Süllemü'l-vuşûl ilâ tabakâtü'l-fuşûl* (“A ladder to attain the degrees of sections [of knowledge]”), where he also notes that “Greek philosophers used to conceal philosophy from the commoners, and they taught it only to the sons of rulers and kings”.⁶⁸ And regarding the execution of the chief astrologer Hüseyin Efendi in 1650, Kâtib Çelebi warns that

it is inauspicious to bring to light and disclose this kind of divine secrets (*bu makûle esrâr-ı ilâhiyyeyi keşf ü ifşâda yümn olmayup*); [he didn't know that] one must conceal with circumspection those things that one learns through deduction and inference from the rules of the craft (*fenn kıvâ'idinden*).⁶⁹

Most of these authors belonged to the ulema apparatus. Kâtib Çelebi's case is more interesting: a student of Kâdızâde Meḥmed who chose a more liberal attitude, actually promoting a tolerance for different lifestyles and a casuistic morality of sorts, he was the first of a series of scholars-cum-bureaucrats who acted outside the *medrese* system (another scholar in this line, Müneccimbaşı

67 Nev'i Efendi, *Texts on Popular Learning in Early Modern Ottoman Times*, v. 2, “The Yield of the Disciplines and the Merits of the Texts”. *Nev'i Efendi's Encyclopaedia Netâ'ic el-Fünûn*, eds G. Procházka-Eisl and H. Çelik (Harvard 2015), 79=229–230.

68 Kurz, *Ways to Heaven*, 216–228; O. Ş. Gökyay, ed., *Kâtib Çelebi'den seçmeler* (Istanbul 1968), 198–200; H. Koç, “XVII. yüzyılın ortasında Osmanlı coğrafyası'ndan antik dönemlere bir bakış: Kâtib Çelebi'nin eserlerinden seçmeler”, *Doğu Batı* 40 (2007), 257–282 at 264–265.

69 Z. Aycibin, “Kâtib Çelebi, *Fezleke*. Tahlil ve metin”, unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Mimar Sinan University, 2007, 1072; copied also by Na'ima, *Târih-i Na'imâ (Ravzatü'l-Hüseyin fi hulâsati abbâri'l-hâfikayn)*, ed. M. İpşirli (Ankara 2007), 3:1272.

Ahmed Dede, was also influenced by Illuminationism). Furthermore, it may be argued that *Isbrāqī* authors, promoting the hermetic tradition of occult sciences, were competing over access to the supernatural against Sufis claiming their own, mystical union with Godly powers.⁷⁰

As far as it concerns techniques to control the supernatural, these authors seem to have moved away from the spiritual vision of the world, served by dream interpretation or the science of letters, toward a more mechanical vision, where correspondences, homologies and hierarchies of the realms of nature connected the microcosm to the macrocosm.⁷¹ In this, they were actually reverting to the medieval tradition of natural/astral magic, best exemplified by the famous tenth-century *Ghāyat al-ḥakīm* or *Picatrix*, which had been shadowed by the lettrist talismanics of the thirteenth-century *Corpus Bunianum* and the ritual/demonic magic of Sufi environments.⁷² As a side remark, it is important to note that scholars such as Kâtib Çelebi may have expressed their preference for a natural/astral magic style of occultism, but they never really cared to deal with them seriously, the way Pico della Mirandola, Ficino or even Newton did.⁷³ Half of Kâtib Çelebi's famous bibliographical encyclopaedia, *Kashf al-zunūn*, is a list of lost sciences, whose topic is described but never really studied. And to my knowledge there is no detailed and systematic treatise of astral magic after Uzun Firdevsī's (d. after 1517) *Da'vet-nāme*, composed in 1487 (which is already full of angelic/demonic elements, but no lettrism).⁷⁴ One of the swansongs of Ottoman lettrism may have been Taşköprüzâde's treatise on plague⁷⁵—and even this consists mostly of talismanic magic squares copied from al-Būnī or al-Biṣṭāmī. While in his own encyclopaedia Taşköprüzâde describes a science

70 On the relationship of Illuminationism with occultism see Kurz, *Ways to Heaven*, 241–243.

71 Cf. Sariyannis, “Knowledge and Control of the Future”, 74–75, 82–83; idem, *The Horizons, Limits, and Taxonomies of Ottoman Knowledge* (Berlin 2021), 35–36.

72 On the general history of Islamic magic see J.-C. Coulon, *La Magie en terre d'islam au Moyen Âge* (Paris 2017); S. Günther – D. Pielow (eds), *Die Geheimnisse der oberen und der unteren Welt. Magie im Islam zwischen Glaube und Wissenschaft* (Leiden 2018); L. Saif – F. Leoni – M. Melvin-Koushki – F. Yahya (eds), *Islamicate Occult Sciences in Theory and Practice* (Leiden 2021).

73 Cf. B. P. Copenhaver, *Magic in Western Culture: From Antiquity to the Enlightenment* (Cambridge 2015).

74 F. Büyükkarcı (ed.), *Firdevsī-i Tavîl and his Da'vet-nāme: Interpretation, Transcription, Index, Facsimile and Microfiche* (Harvard 1995).

75 Melvin-Koushki, “Taşköprüzâde on the (Occult) Science of Plague Prevention and Cure”.

much nearer the natural magic of *Ghāyat al-ḥakīm*, he uses it no more than Kâtib Çelebi.

It is important that we view this tendency for elitism, so to speak, within the wider context of an ongoing democratization of knowledge. The *Ḳāḏizāde*-li movement may be seen as a plea for egalitarianism, where every individual Muslim should reason and develop their principles of faith, without the mediation of theologians and officials. But *Ḥalvetī* and other Sufis, as well, seem to have promoted a similar vision in many ways. It has been noted that catechisms (*‘ilm-i ḥāl*) authored by prominent *Ḥalvetī* sheikhs such as *Sivāsī* or *Niyāzī-i Mıṣrī* stressed that a proper Muslim should have detailed knowledge of their faith and be able to reason thereof and verify it; the same claim was made by more “fundamentalist” authors, the difference of the *Ḥalvetīs* being their suggestion that the Sufi path was necessary to access this level.⁷⁶ Whereas this may sound as elitist as the Hermetic gnosiology of the Illuminationists, it may also be read as an entitlement of every Muslim to knowledge and reasoning. This vision of equality and individual responsibility has been the subject of a number of recent studies, and it seems to encompass a large segment of the “Sunna-minded” and Sufi audiences from the mid-seventeenth century onwards.⁷⁷

It may also be argued that absolutism is strongly threaded into such an egalitarian vision, or perhaps rather a unifying tendency: equality under either a strong ruler or a strict set of confessional rules and principles, followed by all. On the other hand, the high bureaucrats and ulemas favourable to *Isḫrāqī* elitism were more inclined to accept a pluralistic society. And indeed, such pleas for tolerance and pluralism were expressed by *Isḫrāqī* authors, from Kâtib Çelebi to prominent *Mevlevī* sheikhs. Recently *Aslıhan Gürbüz*el suggested that a debate on whether Persian was spoken in Paradise alongside Arabic (and, more generally, whether Persian works and specifically *Rūmī*’s *Meşnevī* were entitled to be read as sacred texts) was closely connected to the *Mevlevīs*’ effort to defend

76 T. Krstić, “You Must Know Your Faith in Detail: Redefinition of the Role of Knowledge and Boundaries of Belief in Ottoman Catechisms (*‘İlm-i ḥāls*)”, in T. Krstić and D. Terzioğlu (eds), *Historicizing Sunni Islam in the Ottoman Empire, c. 1450–c. 1750* (Leiden 2020), 155–195 at 185–188. For the general context see also Kh. El-Rouayheb, *Islamic Intellectual History in the Seventeenth Century: Scholarly Currents in the Ottoman Empire and the Maghreb*, (Cambridge 2015), 97–128.

77 Terzioğlu, “Sunna-Minded Sufi Preachers”, 277–278; N. Shafir, “Moral Revolutions: The Politics of Piety in the Ottoman Empire Reimagined”, *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 61 (2019), 595–623.

themselves against Kadızadeli accusations. The Mevlevis promoted a pluralism expanded to the very core of the latter's arguments, namely tradition: tradition could then be a dynamic concept, that could be expanded to accommodate diverse texts and practices.⁷⁸ Significantly, in this struggle prominent Mevlevī authors connected the *Meşnevī* to Illuminationist philosophical wisdom (*ḥikma*), which could also function as a receptacle for various “innovative” ideas.⁷⁹

III. The waning of scholarly and the second life of vernacular occultism in the eighteenth century

The Sufi world of Ottoman urban societies underwent some major changes from the early eighteenth century on. The multiplication of Sufi orders and figures led to a waning of wide networks, as fraternities were now segmented along neighbourhoods, as well as often family-based.⁸⁰ In this respect, but also due to the developments described in previous sections as the aftermath of the Kādızādeli movement, it is not surprising that Sufi claims to sanctity seem to have become more pietistic than miraculous. We already saw that eighteenth-century Sufi sheikhs turned to a more personal interpretation of miracles, seen now as an epiphany of sorts (“unveiling”, *kaşf*, or “inspiration”, *ilhām*) in which mystical content was revealed to the subject, whereas successful divination, miraculous appearances after death or other interventions to the usual course of things are more and more rarely to be seen. Scholarly culture outside the *tekke*, moreover, turned toward a worldview that emphasised the role of the human actor upon history, as can be documented by the lively theological debates on free will and predestination.⁸¹ In the context of our analysis here, it is of particular importance to note that the terminology and arguments behind this turn (namely, the concept of “particular will”, which is under human con-

78 Gürbüz, “Bilingual Heaven”. On the role of diverse languages in Ottoman esotericism see also Sariyannis, “Languages of Ottoman Esotericism”, *Aca'ib: Occasional papers on the Ottoman perceptions of the supernatural* 2 (2021), 39–76.

79 Gürbüz, “Bilingual Heaven”.

80 See the survey by J. J. Curry, “Sufi Spaces and Practices”, in Sh. Hamadeh – Ç. Kafescioğlu (eds), *A Companion to Early Modern Istanbul* (Leiden 2021), 503–527 at 519–523.

81 E. L. Menchinger, “Free Will, Predestination, and the Fate of the Ottoman Empire,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 77 (2016): 445–66; Idem, “Revisiting ‘Turkish Fatalism’: Or, Why Ottoman Theology Matters”, *Aca'ib: Occasional papers on the Ottoman perceptions of the supernatural* 2 (2021), 9–37. [<https://doi.org/10.26225/rmyr-ar56>]

trol and complements “universal will” in moving the universe) originated from Naqşibendî circles, including ‘Abd al-Ġani al-Nābulusî (d. 1731), Muḥammad Saçaklızāde (d. 1732) and İsmā’il Gelenbevî (d. 1790, a noted scholar who introduced logarithms in Ottoman mathematics).⁸² Indeed, reformed through the Mujaddidî current in a wave that had already swept the Islamic world starting from India, the Naqşibendîs ended up in the late eighteenth century as allies of the Westernising flank of the Ottoman apparatus, aiming to modernise the military.⁸³ It seems that most of the doctors, scholars or officials associated with eighteenth-century experimentalism and naturalism were associated with the Mujaddidî Naqşibendî order.⁸⁴ A highly compelling case of such a Sufi reformist is Ubeydullah Kuşmanî: supported by bureaucrats and young intellectuals, with possible Naqşibendî affiliations, he attacked vehemently Janissary opponents of Selim III’s New Order and praised European military technology in a 1806 treatise. In this effort he rejects fatalism and points out the necessity for the “pursuit of the necessary efforts” (*teşebbüs-i esbāb*), whereas he explains that infidels invent are so capable in inventing new weapons and tools because they “are all oriented toward this world (*sālik-i dūnyā oldukları ecilden*), [so] they always think of increasing their knowledge”; infidel artisans keep an apprentice until he may prove that he can be a master by finding some new knowledge or technique, while Muslims tend to neglect worldly affairs as transitory.⁸⁵

By the early eighteenth century we can already see authors associated with the ulema and the state apparatus in some form, dismissing miraculous deeds and occult sciences. Indeed, several scholars and bureaucrats seem sincerely involved with occult sciences well into the eighteenth century: in 1683 a high-ranking bureaucrat, Bosnavî Şa‘banzāde Meḥmed Efendi (d. 1709) would have the pen boasting of its role in occult sciences, including astrology, geomancy, letter

82 Bruckmayr, “The Particular Will”.

83 A. Yayıoğlu, “Guarding Traditions and Laws—Disciplining Bodies and Souls: Tradition, Science, and Religion in the Age of Ottoman Reform”, *Modern Asian Studies* 52 (2018), 1542–1603, esp. 1584–1591 for the Mujaddidî reform and its role in the Selimian New Order. Cf. also Abu-Manneh, “The Naqshbandiyya-Mujaddidiyya in the Ottoman Lands”, 19–20; A. E. Topal, “Political Reforms as Religious Revival: Conceptual Foundations of *Tanzimat*”, *Oriente Moderno* 101 (2021), 153–180.

84 Küçük, “The Compass and the Astrolabe”, 269.

85 Dihkanizade Kuşmani, *Nizām-ı Cedide dâir bir risâle: Zebîre-i Kuşmânî fi tarîf-i nizâm-ı ilhâmî*, ed. Ö. İşbilir (Ankara 2006), 30; Sariyannis, *History of Ottoman Political Thought*, 416–420; Yayıoğlu, “Guarding Traditions and Laws”, 1591–1597.

magic and alchemy,⁸⁶ while the prolific professor and judge Veliyuddin Carullah Efendi (d. 1738) had collected a remarkable number of books on *cifî*, which he annotated with sincere interest.⁸⁷ However, a growing number of moralist authors had already begun to dismiss this branch of knowledge as vain and futile. Yusuf Nâbî (d. 1712), the famous poet who originated from a Nakşibendî family of Urfa, urges against astrology and geomancy, on the grounds that everything happens according to fate (*takdîr iledür cümle umûr*) and that most astrologers and geomancers are scoundrels, although he admits that geomancy may be a sound science (with no living practitioner): only God knows the hidden world, he concludes.⁸⁸ Even more adamant, his imitator Sünbülzâde Vehbî (d. 1809), who is extremely favourable toward both the Kâdızâdelis and the Nakşibendîs,⁸⁹ likens astrologers with demons with their claim of communicating with the hidden world.⁹⁰ As for the other occult sciences, to which he expands considerably in relation to his predecessor, Vehbî is more than dismissive: geomancers are tricksters; the science of letters (*cifî*) belongs to those who can perform miracles; magic squares are not for everyone and the meaning of the major works on them (al-Bûnî's *Shams al-ma'ârif*) is hidden; incantations (*sihr, rukyâ*) are to be avoided; conjuring of djinn and demons (*narenciyât*) runs the danger of associating with demons and the Satan, who are natural enemies of humanity; alchemy has no truth and is a ridiculous occupation; magic (*simyâ*) is the work of tricksters; the art of finding treasures is harnessed by Northern Africans to accumulate wealth; paper divination or chartomancy only results in wasting one's money; talismans and prophylactics (*tılsmât u himyâ*) are useless, as only God and prudence can guard a man; finally, the art of concealment ('ilm-i *ihfâ*) is also useless and without any truth.⁹¹ The only occult sciences found sound by Vehbî are oniromancy (praising the medieval authority of Ibn

86 E. Tuşalp Atiyas, "Eloquence in Context: Şabanşade Meşmed Efendi's (d.1708-1709) *Münazara-ı Tıg u Kalem* and 'The People of the Pen' in Late Seventeenth-Century Ottoman Empire", *Turcica*, 48 (2017), 113-155 at 124.

87 F. Usluer, "Cârullah Efendi'nin cifî ve tıp ilimlerine dair kitapları", in B. Aşıl (ed.), *Osmanlı kitap kültürü: Cârullah Efendi kütüphanesi ve derkenar notları* (Ankara 2015), 297-312.

88 Nâbî, *Hayriyye*, ed. İ. Pala (Istanbul 1989), 106 (v. 644-654).

89 Sünbülzâde Vehbî, *Lutfiyye-i Vehbî*, ed. G. Tanıdır Alıcı (Kahramanmaraş 2011), 78-81 and 84-85 (v. 211-213 and 234-235).

90 Sünbülzâde Vehbî, *Lutfiyye-i Vehbî*, ed. Tanıdır Alıcı, 58-63 (v. 110-128).

91 Sünbülzâde Vehbî, *Lutfiyye-i Vehbî*, ed. Tanıdır Alıcı, 62-77 (v. 129-196).

Shirin) and physiognomy.⁹² Even in minor works of this period, such as a book of advice (*pendnâme*) by the poet Zarîfî (d. 1795), we find sections urging the reader to avoid alchemy, magic, the art of finding treasures and various forms of conjuration (*kimyâ ve simyâ ve defîne ve huddâm ve kırtâsiye*), actually denying the common man's access to such knowledge, rather than the truth of these sciences itself.⁹³ Notably, both Nâbî and Vehbî devote a large number of verses to alchemy, indicating that this science was quite expanded among the elite; Nâbî stresses its difficulty and its futility,⁹⁴ while Vehbî ridicules it at length.⁹⁵

An interesting example can be found in the work of the otherwise unknown Abdullah Hâlim Efendi, who wrote a peculiar political treatise in 1791 in support of Selim III's reforms. He most probably was affiliated to the Nağşibendî order, as he mentions his sheikh who can be identified with the sheikh of the Nağşibendî lodge in Fatih.⁹⁶ In the conclusion of his treatise, where a sheikh (the author's alter ego) rejects the arguments of a host of imaginary persons representing various groups of Ottoman society, Abdullah Hâlim dismisses all kinds of occult knowledge,⁹⁷ from astrology to divination and dream interpretation:

Whoever says that “astrologers know the hidden (*gayb*)” is an infidel. They do not know the hidden, they gather information from experience (*tecrübe*). For instance, a sailor who says that a southeast wind will rise on seeing a cloud toward the *qibla* is not an infidel; neither what he says comes always true. Because experience is not a source of knowledge (*tecrübe, esbâb-ı 'ilmden değildir*); it is not a sign (of the future), it is an indication (of possible outcomes) (*tecrübe 'alâmet dahi olmaz, olsa*

92 Sünbülzâde Vehbî, *Lutfiyye-i Vehbî*, ed. Tanıdır Alıcı, 64–65 and 90–91 (v. 134–135 and 269–274).

93 Zarîfî, *Pendnâme-i Zarîfî*, ed. M. Arslan (Sivas 1994), 32–34 (v. 306–324).

94 Nâbî, *Hayriyye*, ed. Pala, 205–217 (v. 1391–1483).

95 Sünbülzâde Vehbî, *Lutfiyye-i Vehbî*, ed. Tanıdır Alıcı, 66–73 (v. 149–176).

96 A. Şahin, “Abdullah Halim Efendi'nin *Seyfül-izzet ila hazreti sahibi'd-devlet* adlı kitabının çevirim yazısı ve değerlendirilmesi”, unpublished MA thesis, Marmara University 2009, 17. However, the author includes the Nağşibendîs in his accusations against modern-day dervishes, whose faults, he insists, do not stain the founders of the *tariqas* (ibid., 219: he speaks of the Nağşibendîs' hypocrisy). Cf. Sariyannis, *History of Ottoman Political Thought*, 366–368.

97 He also warns poets not to exaggerate the extraordinary element in narrating miracles of the saints, and rejects tomb veneration: Şahin, “Abdullah Halim Efendi'nin *Seyfül-izzet*”, 187, 218.

emâre olur): the southwest wind is an indication of rain, but it often happens that upon the southwest wind we see windy weather instead of rain...

Whoever says “I conjured the jinn and they brought me information from the hidden [world]” is also an infidel... You say, “I saw him with my eyes”. I do not believe your eyes or anything; I only believe to the word of sharia... There is no divine, nor geomancer, nor jinn... Suffice to mention the illustrious fetva from the fetvas of Abdurrahim Efendi (in office 1715–1716): Question – If Zeyd says “I will conjure a jinni in a mirror” (*âyine içinde cin da’vet idirin deyü*) and drives astray the Muslims with such tricks, what should become of him? Answer – He should be punished severely and stay in prison until his improvement is manifest. Whoever claims knowledge from the things hidden (*muğayyibâta ‘ilm iddi’â iderse*) must be subject to renewal of faith and marriage...

Dreams can be true, but they depend on their understanding (*battâ nazar-ı zabt-dadır*). Even when one is awake and hears some words, one cannot always render it as it was heard; all the more so difficult it is to render rightly what one has heard in one’s sleep.⁹⁸

Astrology, the most “scientific” of occult sciences and the longest living one, was distrusted even by the Sultans Abdulhamid I (r. 1774–1789) and Selim III (r. 1789–1807), although they felt compelled to listen to their palace astrologers for the sake of tradition;⁹⁹ and by 1848 even a professional astrologer would express his doubts regarding his science, disappointed by its lack of success in his everyday life.¹⁰⁰

At the same period, a very practical naturalism dominated the “science market” of Istanbul, creating vernacular forms of knowledge and combining practices of divination with aspects of European engineering and technology.¹⁰¹

98 Şahin, “Abdullah Halim Efendi’nin *Seyfîl-izzet*”, 188 (on astrology and causality), 226–227 (on divination), 227ff. (on dreams).

99 S. Aydüz, “Osmanlı Devleti’nde müneccimbaşılık müessesesi”, *Belleten*, 70:257 (2006), 167–264 at 180.

100 G. Tunalı, “An Ottoman Astrologer at Work: Sadullah el-Ankaravî and the Everyday Practice of *İlm-i nücüm*”, in F. Geogon and F. Hitzel (eds), *Les Ottomans et le temps* (Leiden 2012), 39–59.

101 B. H. Küçük, “Science and Technology”, in *A Companion to Early Modern Istanbul*, eds. Sh. Hamadeh and Ç. Kafesçioglu (Leiden 2021), 607–633; Idem, “The Compass and the Astrolabe”.

Among these practical artisans, many were Sufis, mostly Mevlevīs, who produced mechanical clocks and other time-keeping instruments.¹⁰² Feza Günergun suggests that “they may have been captivated by the regular revolutions of the gears and correlated these with Sufi meditative rituals”,¹⁰³ but one may argue that Mevlevīs were in general willing to be involved with all kinds of natural science, including alchemy and medicine: a typical case is Ömer Şifāī (d. 1742), the son of a Mevlevī sheikh who had studied occult sciences (‘ulūm-i ġarībe) under a Ḥalvetī sheikh in Egypt but ended up being a prominent iatrochemist in Bursa using extensively European alchemical and medical sources. Similar scholars of the same period also belonged to branches of the Ḥalvetī or, predominantly it seems, the Naqşibendī-Mujaddidī order.¹⁰⁴ A sheikh of the same brotherhood, Erzurumī İbrahim Hakki (d. 1780), is famous for introducing Copernican astronomy in his compendium of human knowledge, the 1757 *Mārifetnāme*; he remarks that

believing in and trusting the new astronomy is not one of the foundations of the religious matters nor one of the vehicles to increase one’s firm belief (*yakīn*). Because no matter what is the shape and the form of the globe, no matter what is the arrangement of heaven and earth, no matter how the firmament revolves, it is impossible to deny that the universe was created and that no other than the Highest God, the creator of the most beautiful and perfect things, might have created it.¹⁰⁵

In order to reassure those who think that this “philosophical opinion” contradicts religion (*bu re’y-i felsefī şer’-i şerīfe muḥālif zann olunursa*), Erzurumī quotes al-Gazālī to the effect that differences between these opinions can be either only in name (i.e. same things can be named with different terms),¹⁰⁶ or things that do not pertain to religion, such as eclipses (in which case, arguing against

102 F. Günergun, “Timekeepers and Sufi Mystics: Technical Knowledge Bearers of the Ottoman Empire”, *Technology and Culture* 62/2 (2021), 348–372.

103 Günergun, “Timekeepers and Sufi Mystics”, 363.

104 F. Günergun, “Convergences in and around Bursa: Sufism, Alchemy, Iatrochemistry in Turkey, 1500–1750”, in P. H. Smith (ed.), *Entangled Itineraries: Materials, Practices, and Knowledges across Eurasia* (Pittsburgh 2019), 227–257; Küçük, “The Compass and the Astrolabe”, 269–275.

105 Erzurumī İbrahim Hakki, *Mārifetnāme*, University of Michigan, Special Collections Research Center, Isl. Ms. 826, 199; ed. F. Meyan, *Mārifetnāme (Tam metin)* (Istanbul 2000), 270–271.

106 He also insists that numbers such as “five hundred years’ distance” for the magnitude of

a proven scientific truth would be damaging faith), or things that pertain to the foundations of religion, such as whether the world was created or eternal (in which case, they have to be refuted).¹⁰⁷

This, however, does not suggest that esotericism and more particularly occult practices of accessing the hidden world fell into disuse. Miracles such as the appearance of a dead sheikh in blood and flesh continued being recorded in *Ḥalvetī* or *Celvetī* (but provincial) milieus well into the nineteenth century.¹⁰⁸ The torch was handed over to the vernacular culture, which by the early eighteenth century was blooming: bottom-up literacy (“artisan literacy”, according to Nelly Hanna, or “nouveau literacy”, in Dana Sajdi’s work),¹⁰⁹ closely connected to a simultaneous boom in new forms of sociability,¹¹⁰ emerged

earth in some old books are simply symbolic: Erzurumī İbrahim Hakkı, *Māʾrifetnāme*, University of Michigan, 171; ed. Meyan, *Māʾrifetnāme*, 233–234.

107 Erzurumī İbrahim Hakkı, *Māʾrifetnāme*, University of Michigan, 78–79; ed. Meyan, *Māʾrifetnāme*, 86–88.

108 Such the case of a *Ḥalvetī* sheikh executed in Crete in 1757, whose miracles were recorded by a *Celvetī* author who died in 1824/5; M. Tatcı – C. Kurnaz – Y. Aydemir, *Giritli Salacıoğlu Mustafa ve Mesnevileri* (Ankara 2001), 112–113; N. Clayer – A. Popović, “Les réseaux soufis dans la Crète ottomane”, in A. Anastasopoulos (ed.), *The Eastern Mediterranean under Ottoman Rule: Crete, 1645–1840. Halcyon Days in Crete VI. A Symposium Held in Rethymno, 13–15 January 2006* (Rethymno 2008), 211–230 at 217; M. Sariyannis, «Ένας ετερόδοξος μουσουλμάνος στην Κρήτη του 18ου αιώνα» [A Heterodox Muslim in 18th Century Crete], in K. Lappas, A. Anastasopoulos, E. Kolovos (eds), *Μνήμη Πηνελόπης Σπάθη. Μελέτες ιστορίας και φιλολογίας* [In memoriam Penelope Stathi. Studies on History and Literature] (Herakleio 2010), 371–385.

109 S. Faroqhi, *Subjects of the Sultan: Culture and Daily Life in the Ottoman Empire* (London and New York 2000), 185–191; N. Hanna, “Literacy and the ‘Great Divide’ in the Islamic World, 1300–1800,” *Journal of Global History* 2 (2007), 175–193; Eadem, “Literacy among Artisans and Tradesmen in Ottoman Cairo,” in *The Ottoman World*, ed. Ch. Woodhead (London 2012), 319–331; D. Sajdi, *The Barber of Damascus: Nouveau Literacy in the Eighteenth-Century Ottoman Levant* (Stanford 2013); Timothy J. Fitzgerald, “Reaching the Flocks: Literacy and the Mass Reception of Ottoman Law in the Sixteenth-Century Arab World,” *Journal of the Ottoman and Turkish Studies Association* 2,1 (2015), 5–20; cf. also Z. Altok, “The 18th-Century ‘Istanbul Tale’”, in *A Companion to Early Modern Istanbul*, eds. Hamadeh and Kafescioğlu, 581–604.

110 On this development see Sh. Hamadeh, *The City’s Pleasures: Istanbul in the Eighteenth Century* (Seattle 2008); C. Kafadar, “How Dark is the History of the Night, How Black the Story of Coffee, How Bitter the Tale of Love: The Changing Measure of Leisure and Pleasure in Early-Modern Istanbul,” in *Medieval and Early-Modern Performance in the Eastern Mediterranean*, eds. A. Öztürkmen and E. Birge Vitz (Turnhout 2014), 243–269 and esp. at

throughout the second half of the seventeenth century and produced a large number of manuscripts, miscellanea, personal notes or recollections throughout the eighteenth century. Indeed, eighteenth and even nineteenth-century manuscripts of this sort are plenty of notes on divination. From the sample Jan Schmidt studied (coming only from Dutch libraries), most of the miscellanea containing notes on astrology, bibliomancy, geomancy, dream interpretation or talismans date from the late eighteenth and the early nineteenth century, reaching as far as the turn of the twentieth century.¹¹¹ Not surprisingly, it was the janissaries and the artisans associated with them who constituted the bulk of this new culture of readers and authors.¹¹² However, identifying them with the authors or readers of the occultist miscellanea mentioned above is neither as easy nor as safe as one might expect. Authors of notes and possessors of the manuscripts described by Schmidt may be identified as low-class ulema (*na'ib* in ca. 1690, an imam ca. 1790), Sufis of often uncertain affiliation (a Rifa'i/Sa'di sheikh in ca. 1800, a dervish from a *tekke* in Katerini, modern Greece, in ca. 1900) or low-rank officials and clerks (a clerk of the financial bureaucracy, ca. 1700; the secretary of the *ka'immakam*, ca. 1800; an official of the arsenal, ca. 1810).¹¹³ Indeed, we know that an emphasis on orality seen in mid-seventeenth century Bayrāmī-Melāmī conceded space to “bookish knowledge” in the following decades; the reason may be the potential for participation in the bureaucratic elite (as postulated by Betül Yavuz), but also the general expan-

244–246; M. Sariyannis, “Sociability, Public Life, and Decorum,” in *A Companion to Early Modern Istanbul*, eds. Hamadeh and Kafesçioğlu, 473–502.

111 J. Schmidt, “The Occult Sciences and their Importance in Ottoman Culture: Evidence from Turkish Manuscripts in Dutch Public Collections,” *Osmanlı Araştırmaları* 23 (2003), 219–254.

112 See e.g. E. Sezer Aydınlı, “Unusual Readers in Early Modern Istanbul: Manuscript Notes of Janissaries and Other Riff-Raff on Popular Heroic Narratives,” *Journal of Islamic Manuscripts* 9 (2018), 109–131; T. Değirmenci, “Bir kitabı kaç kişi okur? Osmanlı’da okurlar ve okuma biçimleri üzerine bazı gözlemler,” *Tarih ve Toplum Yeni Yaklaşımlar* 13 (2011), 7–43, now also available in English as “A Book is Read by How Many People? Some Observations on Readers and Reading Modes in the Ottoman Empire,” *Lingua Franca* 5 (2019), <https://www.sharpweb.org/linguafranca/issue-5-2019-ottoman-print-culture/> (accessed December 2020). On these strata as main opponents of the Westernising project, supported by members of the administrative apparatus and a Sharia-minded, Nakşibendî-dominated trend of thought, see Yayıoğlu, “Guarding Traditions and Laws”.

113 Schmidt, “The Occult Sciences and their Importance”.

sion of literacy among the lower classes.¹¹⁴ A recent study on manuscript collections of stories read in janissary milieus in the late eighteenth century unfortunately does not focus in this kind of notes, although “astrological symbols” are mentioned;¹¹⁵ and we know of some eighteenth-century janissary copyists of religious and Sufi literature.¹¹⁶ In sum, the material and studies at hand do not allow us to conclude about any special involvement of janissary-affiliated readers or authors in occultist literature.¹¹⁷

Thus, debates on the source of knowledge predominated in Ottoman cultural life, and claims for the priority of one or another source played a crucial role as they could determine who had a legitimate access to things hidden.¹¹⁸ These debates can be associated with greater currents of thought, closely connected to specific Sufi or at any rate religious affiliations: the Kāḏızādeli and Naḡşibendī emphasis on human agency and piety (and on the absence of revelation or miracle in present times), the Hālvētī (and others’) claim for continuous contact with the supernatural, and the Illuminationist combination of revelatory and hermetic knowledge with rational science (not to mention some materialist tendencies, insufficiently studied so far, from the late seventeenth century on).¹¹⁹

114 Yavuz, “Orality in the *Tekke*”, 72.

115 Sezer Aydınlı, “Unusual Readers”, 123. In the author’s main source, a manuscript of Firuzşāh’s story, no such note is recorded: Eadem, *The Oral and the Written in Ottoman Literature: The Reader Notes on the Story of Firuzşāh* (Istanbul 2015). Neither can we find any note on occultism of any sort recorded by Değirmenci, “Bir kitabı kaç kişi okur?”

116 M. Kökre, “Müstensih Yeniçeriler,” *Türk Dünyası Tarih-Kültür Dergisi* 349 (2016), 22–24.

117 Some exemplary analyses of such manuscripts (unfortunately concerning earlier periods) are those by A. T. Şen, “Manuscript On the Battlefields: Early Modern Ottoman Subjects in the European Theatre of War and Their Textual Relations to the Supernatural in Their Fight For Survival”, *Aca’ib: Occasional papers on the Ottoman perceptions of the supernatural* 2 (2021), 77–106 (<https://doi.org/10.26225/08gy-3v52>) (on a sailor or seafarer’s text, dated from the late sixteenth century); and “The Emotional Universe of Insecure Scholars in the Early Modern Ottoman Hierarchy of Learning”, *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 53 (2021), 315–321 (on a mid-sixteenth century judge; for his numerical divinatory methods see *ibid.*, 321).

118 I am delving more into this topic in Sariyannis, “Sources and Traditions of Knowledge”.

119 See M. Sariyannis, *Perceptions ottomanes du surnaturel. Aspects de l’histoire intellectuelle d’une culture islamique à l’époque moderne* (Paris 2019), 97–100.

The manner in which these debates intermingled with social groups and conflicts has yet to be determined; we hope that the path illuminated by this paper may lead to meaningful results. As noted above, the study of the social history of Sufi brotherhoods in the Ottoman Empire is still in its beginnings, so one must take the associations put forth in this paper as research hypotheses, rather than well-researched suggestions. One should especially note the absence of the popular Kādirī order in my argumentation, all the more since one of its branches, the Eşrefī, seems to be closely associated with Ottoman alchemist writing.¹²⁰ Hopefully, it will be included to a future re-assessment of the subject.

However, the Kādzīzādeli/Naqşibendī reaction against the Sufi claims to a miraculous reality may be linked with some safety to the emergence of mercantile strata of a proto-capitalistic mentality, as their discourse was fit for the audience of these “newcomers” to the urban economy (as shown, for instance, in the vocabulary used in the 1691 attempt to abolish *narḥ* prices).¹²¹ Small traders and artisans, working under the guild system, continued to favour Sufi brotherhoods such as the Ḥalvetīs and their branches, the Bayrāmī-Melāmīs or even, arguably, the Mevlevīs, who continued to offer mediation with supernatural forces, ways to secure the future through divination or talismanic magic, and state-like protection by the divinity. On the other hand, the hermetic stream of Illuminationism was wholeheartedly adopted by the bureaucratic elite, who felt threatened by the expansion of the political nation and the alliance of the janissaries with the guilds. Kātib Çelebi’s programmatic encyclopaedism was targeting at a potential audience of his peers, not the common folk; his attitude against the lower classes may be summarised as “let them be as they wish (so as not to rebel)”, as opposed to the egalitarian tendencies of both the Kādzīzādeli and Sufi pietism. His plea for change and reform, theoretically founded on Ibn Khaldūn’s sociology, looked up to a centralising vizier who would impose the necessary measures.¹²²

120 T. Artun, “Hearts of Gold and Silver: The Production of Alchemical Knowledge in the Early Modern Ottoman World”, unpublished PhD thesis, Princeton University 2013, esp. 162–184. A deep involvement with alchemy can also be seen in Ismā’il Ḥaḳḳı Bursevī, the famous Celvetī sheikh: *ibid.*, 61, 188; İsmâil Hakkı Bursevî, *Tamâmü'l-feyz*, eds Muslu – Namlı, 282–287, translated in M. Sariyannis, “Examples of Translated Materials for the Study of Ottoman Occultism II”, *Aca’ib: Occasional papers on the Ottoman perceptions of the supernatural* 2 (2021), 177–188 at 182–184.

121 Sariyannis, “The Kādzīzādeli Movement”, 289.

122 See Sariyannis, *History of Ottoman Political Thought*, 285–302.

Debates on knowledge and access to the supernatural seem to have lost their relevance in the eighteenth century, when other topics such as military reform won the day. From the scarce (or little studied) material we have in our hands, it seems that the “disenchantment” process that had begun with both the *Ḳāḏızādeli* reaction and *Kâtib Çelebi*’s rationalization expanded to wider parts of society and led to growingly larger segments of the educated, not only elite members but also common folk, abandoning occultist approaches to knowledge in favour of the new natural sciences and technologies. The greater visibility of occult manuscripts in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries should perhaps be attributed to the growth of low-class literacy, which made janissaries, small traders, low-rank local sheikhs or ulema leaving more traces of their esoteric musings. Still, it would be hasty to postulate that highly educated elites lost any interest in occultist approaches to reality. While these might have fallen out of fashion, they did not fall out of use. Ultimately, the “enlightened” attitude that prevailed did not prevent parts of them from seeking techniques and ways to communicate with the Hereafter, and by the 1850s, members of the new intellectual elites (like their Western European counterparts) were ready to adopt a new form of esotericism, secular and more “scientific” this time, namely spiritualism.¹²³

123 Ö. Türesay, “Between Science and Religion: Spiritism in the Ottoman Empire (1850s–1910s)”, *Studia Islamica* 113 (2018), 166–200.

Copyright: © 2022 The Institute for Mediterranean Studies/FORTH and the Author(s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC-BY 4.0), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited. See <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>.

Aca'ib: Occasional papers on the Ottoman perceptions of the supernatural is an open access journal published by the Institute for Mediterranean Studies/FORTH.