

Magic at the Imperial Palace, 1876–8

EDHEM ELDEM (Istanbul)

Introduction

It will come as no surprise that magic and other forms of belief in the supernatural should have been present at the Ottoman palace and in the everyday life of its inhabitants. Given the extent to which such practices are still alive in everyday life throughout Turkey, from the mildest form of rituals and gestures meant to ward off the “evil eye” (*nazar*), to the widespread belief in the existence of *cins*/jinns (Ottoman fairies or leprechauns?), or to the Islamically unorthodox propensity to visit and honour by gifts or ex-votos the shrines and tombs of individuals reputed for their saintly power, it seems logical to assume that things would not have been very different centuries ago. We also know how frequently individuals supposed to have mastered control over the occult have used their reputation to gain some form of political or social pre-eminence in Ottoman times, as with the seventeenth-century “magician” Karabaşzade Hüseyin Efendi, AKA “Cinci Hoca,” who managed to keep Sultan İbrahim under his thumb and derive much power from this position. I do not think I need to remind the readers of this journal of the relevance of such beliefs to Ottoman culture, both high and low, given the number of sources one can find that relate to “magic, to the marvellous, and to the strange in Ottoman mentalities.”

What seems to be missing most, however, is first-hand narratives and descrip-

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tions that may go beyond stating and describing in general terms the obvious 'enchantment' of Ottoman society,¹ and provide us with enough material to understand how such beliefs and practices actually unfolded in everyday life, be it in the higher spheres of power or among the middling or lower classes of the population. Obviously, the problem is less one of absence than of availability, considering that such information can be found scattered throughout a vast spectrum of sources, from state archives to private papers, and from manuscripts to the daily press. This is particularly true of one subgenre, or sub-phenomenon, in the domain, namely that of dreams and their interpretation. A standard feature of early-modern Ottoman life,² dreams remain a recurrent feature of the 'modern' era, as suggested by the surprisingly high number of documents one can find in the Ottoman state archives, simply by browsing the online catalogue. If dreams could find their way into the official documentation of the late Ottoman Empire, one can only imagine what is likely to emerge from the thousands of manuscript *mecmuas* (literally, collections, in fact near-diary note- and scrapbooks) kept in the libraries of Turkey.

Nonetheless, even if one were to collect these bits and pieces of information lying across the documentary wilderness, one would still have difficulty finding

- 1 For the last decades of the Empire, on which I will be focusing, one can draw a tentative and disappointingly short list of works that provide their readers with a rich, but generic, kind of information on the topic: H. Carnoy and J. Nicolaides, *Traditions populaires de l'Asie mineure* (Paris 1889); Carnoy and Nicolaides, *Traditions populaires de Constantinople et de ses environs. Contributions au folklore des Turcs, Chrétiens, Arméniens, etc.* (Paris 1892); Carnoy and Nicolaides, *Folklore de Constantinople* (Paris 1894); L. J. M. Garnett, *The Women of Turkey and Their Folk-Lore* (London 1891); Abdülaziz Bey, *Osmanlı Âdet, Merasim ve Tabirleri. Âdât ve Merasim-i Kadime, Tabirât ve Muamelât-i Kavmiye-i Osmaniye* (Istanbul 1995), vol. II, 369–374; İstanbul Ansiklopedisi, s.v. "Büyü, Büyücüler" (Reşad Ekrem Koçu); M. H. Bayrı, *İstanbul Folkloru* (Istanbul 1947).
- 2 One needs only to browse through the pages of Evliya Çelebi's "book of travels" (*Seyahat-name*) to find scores of references to the "extraordinary," especially dreams as part of his narrative plot, but also as a reflection of a real interest of his protagonists. See, for example, *The Intimate Life of an Ottoman Statesman. Melek Ahmed Pasha (1588–1662), as Portrayed in Evliya Çelebi's Book of Travels (Seyahat-Name)*, trans. and ed. R. Dankoff (Albany 1991). A few collections of "dream letters" kept by early modern Ottoman subjects have provided historians with excellent material allowing for a peek into their minds and beliefs: Asiye Hatun, *Rüya Mektupları*. ed. C. Kafadar (Istanbul 1994); *Kitâbü'l-Menâmât: Sultan III. Murad'ın Rüya Mektupları*, ed. Ö. Felek (Istanbul 2012); A. Niyazioğlu, *Dreams and Lives in Ottoman Istanbul. A Seventeenth-Century Biographer's Perspective* (London-New York 2017).

texts that are continuous and consistent enough to provide a true, sustained, and personalised narrative rather than an assemblage of however many cases can be brought together through research and compilation. What has pushed me to engage in a domain that is not central to my concerns or competences is precisely the discovery and use I have made of one such source. I believe it offers a rare opportunity to present a well-rounded and multi-layered case study on magic at the Ottoman palace in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. In fact, I should qualify this statement by noting that rather than a self-standing single narrative, what I have actually come across is a few references in a personal document, which have led me to a vast number of other sources, and which, once unravelled, have provided me with the building blocks of a consistent narrative. In that sense, I must insist on the fact that this is not the simple transfer of information from one rich source, but rather the result of an exciting historiographical adventure with multiple and unexpected twists and turns. Among these, I was particularly pleased to realise that the end result went against the grain of some of the dominant features that often accompany the documentation on magic and the supernatural, namely orientalism, sexism, and racism.

Sultan Murad and Cleanthi Scalieri

What sparked my discovery was my ongoing work on the memoirs and diaries of Prince Selahaddin Efendi (1861–1915), the son of Sultan Murad V (1840–1904), whose ephemeral reign in 1876 lasted only three months. [Ill. 1] Murad, known for his liberal and Western(ist) ideas and for his proximity to the Young Ottoman opposition of the late 1860s, particularly Namık Kemal (1840–88), had greatly invested in this image in preparation of his succession to Sultan Abdülaziz (1830–76, r. 1861–76). [Ill. 2] His turn on the throne came suddenly when a coup led by Midhat and Hüseyin Avni pashas toppled Abdülaziz on 30 May 1876. However, what should have been his chance to show his ability and willingness to engage in much-desired reforms soon turned into a nightmare. When, a few days after being deposed, Abdülaziz killed himself — or, according to some, was assassinated by the junta — the news of his uncle's tragic end came as a shock to Murad, who collapsed mentally and physically, in what was probably a manic-depressive episode facilitated by his chronic alcoholism. Efforts to treat him and to hide his condition failed; after three months of procrastination, on 31 August 1876, he was deposed on grounds of incurable insanity (*cünun-ı mutbik*), ceding the sultanate to the next in line, his brother



1. Sultan Murad V on horseback on his way to Dolmabahçe Mosque. *L'Univers illustré*, 10 June 1876. Author's collection.



2. Sultan Murad V, surrounded by the portraits of 'Young Turks': Ziya Bey, Mustafa Fazıl Pasha, Simon Deutsch, Namik Kemal, Agâh Efendi. *Le Monde illustré*, 10 June 1876. Author's collection.



UNE REVOLUTION A CONSTANTINOPLE. — Massacre des insurgés dans le Palais de Tchéragan, habité par l'ex-sultan Mourad. — (Dessiné de M. Luy, d'après le croquis de M. L. Fragon, sous correspondance dans les murs d'Orient.)

3. Artist's rendition of the storming of Çırağan Palace by Ali Suavi on 20 May 1878. *Le Monde illustré*, 8 June 1878. Author's collection.

Abdülhamid II (1842–1918, r. 1876–1909). Thus ended the 'year of the three sultans' with an ambitious prince ascending the throne with a clear intent to set up a system that would ward off any of the menaces he had witnessed in the past months. This was the beginning of a reign, which, after shortly paying lip service to constitutionalism, reverted to a strongly personalised and oppressive autocracy that would last thirty years, until the Young Turk Revolution of 1908.

Unsurprisingly, the consequences of this turn of events were catastrophic for Murad V and, by extension, his entire family and household. They were assigned to a heavily guarded residence at Çırağan Palace; however, the relative leniency that was shown to the recluse completely dissipated after the attempt, on 20 May 1878, by the Islamist revolutionary Ali Suavi (1839–78) to storm the deposed sultan's residence with about 200 men, with the aim to reinstate him as sultan. The event ended in bloodshed, almost all the assailants being shot and bludgeoned to death by the police force; as a result, Murad and his household were transferred to the neighbouring Feriye Palace. [Ill. 3] The minimal contacts they had with the outer world were completely severed and they were forced to

live in a de facto prison. For the next 26 years, until Murad's death in 1904, the entire household lived in almost complete isolation, under the watchful eye of officials and eunuchs from Abdülhamid's own palace of Yıldız, atop the hill. One could estimate the number of inmates to about a hundred: Murad; his mother Şevkefza; his wives and concubines, his only son Selahaddin and his wives, concubines, and, later, children; his daughters; and a large number of slave women (*cariye*) accompanied by half a dozen eunuchs.

In this stifling context of internment and social death that Selahaddin Efendi produced a unique — by Ottoman standards — corpus of personal writings: a daily diary for about ten years, memoirs and recollections, essays on a variety of issues, scrapbooks of documents and mementos from his youth. My interest in the supernatural arose from the first volume of the series that I published, which focused on one particular notebook from the prince's memoirs and recollections, which he had meticulously filled with copies of the correspondence between his father and Cleanthi Scalieri (1833–92).³ Scalieri, a Greek Ottoman stockbroker, had established a connection with Murad when the latter was still heir to the throne. At the time, Scalieri was grand master of the *Proodos* (*Η Πρόοδος*, Progress) masonic lodge in Istanbul, and was working towards opening his dominantly Greek lodge to a wider Ottoman entourage, especially by attracting Muslims. It seems he managed to attract the attention of the prince through his recently co-opted chamberlain, Ahmed Seyyid Bey. At any rate, Murad was initiated in October 1872, and promoted to the rank of master by December. There is no doubt that on his part this was a political investment, a way of adding yet another layer to his commitment to modernity and the West. [III. 4]

The correspondence between the two men, however, was from a much later date. Scalieri was deeply attached to Murad, and he probably had serious expectations from his accession, which soon dissipated as the sultan lost first his mental health, followed by his throne. This probably explains why Scalieri became one of the most ardent defenders of Murad's rights against what he felt was the usurpation of a conniving and evil brother. He engaged in several attempts to infiltrate the ex-sultan's prison and free him, all of which failed, forcing him to flee to Athens. There he launched a campaign aimed at rousing support from

3 E. Eldem, *V. Murad'ın Oğlu Selahaddin Efendi'nin Evrak ve Yazıları*, I, *V. Murad ile Cleanthi Scalieri* (Istanbul 2019).



4. Cleanthi Scalieri in Masonic garb. Photograph by Basile Kargopoulos. Ömer M. Koç collection, Istanbul.

several political actors of the time, from William Gladstone to Theodoros Deligiannis, backed by the publication of a long pamphlet to support his claims.⁴

It was during this period of self-exile that Scalieri managed to maintain clandestine correspondence with Murad. Selahaddin Efendi, acting as his father's secretary, dutifully copied these into one of his notebooks, from the end of 1883 to mid-1886. The fact that he recorded both incoming and outgoing letters enables us to reconstitute the entirety of the correspondence, allowing

⁴ C. Scalieri, *Appel à la justice internationale des grandes puissances par rapport au grand procès de Constantinople par suite de la mort du feu sultan Aziz adressé par Cléanthis Scalieri au nom du sultan Mourad accusé, de Midhat Pacha & des autres accusés* (Athens 1881). A second and a Greek edition would be published the following year.

for a fascinating insight into the minds and schemes of a deposed sultan and his Greek partisan, revealing a strange – but certainly not supernatural – episode of late-Ottoman political history.

Magnetism and magic

Unless we consider that Freemasonry flirted with some aspects of occultism, nothing in the correspondence alludes to any form of magic. While there is a great deal of nonsense in it – among Scalieri's plans was to kidnap Murad, take him to Athens, and allow him to lead the Greek army into Istanbul to reclaim his throne – the remainder was largely comprised of lamentations on Murad and his family's fate and ruminations on ways by which to attract the sympathies and support of Western powers. And yet, my collateral research in the Ottoman archives suddenly revealed morsels of information that pointed in the direction of the mobilisation of 'unorthodox' means to save Murad from the state of destitution he found himself in.

Indeed, one of the major issues at hand was the ex-sultan's health, or more specifically his mental health. As he had been deposed on grounds of insanity, his supporters' greatest hope was to see him regain his senses and thus be able to reclaim his lawful rights over the throne. If they were able to prove that his mental health had improved to the point of being able to handle his responsibilities as a monarch, this would invalidate the process by which he had been deposed, and his brother – who, they assumed, had promised to do so – would abdicate in his favour. There was a lot of wishful thinking involved, but it was the only bit of hope the family and his partisans could cling to, thus turning the issue of his health and recovery into a crucially important one.

Although it is clear that Murad did recover, at least partially, this was not yet the case in the first months, and possibly years, of his internment. The visits by foreign and local physicians had ceased after a last consultation three weeks after his deposition, which confirmed the incurability that had justified this measure. From that moment on, Abdülhamid's main concern had been to keep Murad secluded and to prevent any kind of contact that might bring into question that diagnosis. This explains that, as we will see, his entourage inside and supporters outside made desperate moves to reverse this situation. Two strategies were employed in conjunction. On the one hand, rumours were spread concerning his recovery, thus preparing the ground for whatever action might

be taken to reinstate him, or at least free him from confinement. On the other hand, efforts were made to secure him any form of treatment or cure, a clear indication that he was far from having recovered.

In the absence of any mention of these concerns in Selahaddin Efendi's memoirs — understandably, he was not eager to mention his father's illness in any other way than as a temporary and now bygone inconvenience — it is in the Ottoman archives that I came across the first concrete reference to a form of (para)medical intervention. This information appeared in Aziz Bey's interrogation minutes, after he was arrested for having set up a 'committee' (*komite*) — the buzz word for any revolutionary activity at the time — to free Murad and, by implication, to overthrow Abdülhamid II: [Ill. 5]

When Sultan Murad was deposed this Kırlandi (Cleanthi)⁵ went to Paris to find one of those magnetizers⁶ or spiritual masters⁷ and brought him to Istanbul. At that time, although Sultan Murad was [still] at Çırağan Palace, it was not easy to get in and out. At the end of the day, the said Kırlandi managed to get the magnetizer into the palace, and he stayed there for about ten days. Whatever he did was beneficial to Sultan Murad, and they say he got well. I also saw the magnetizer he had brought in Kırlandi's home. He was given two or three hundred liras, which with other gratifications came up to five-six hundred and then returned to Paris. After that Sultan Murad was fully conscious and started writing to Kırlandi, saying "work hard, I want my rights back," to which Kırlandi started answering "we are working hard, I am trying to muster strong forces."⁸

5 Cleanthi Scalieri's name was always challenging to Ottoman penpushers. As surnames were generally not taken into account, he rarely appears as "İskalyeri". Most of the time, one is faced with phonetic deformations of Cleanthi, such as the one here.

6 *Manyetizmcı*.

7 *Ruhani hoca*. *Hoca* can be used to describe a Muslim cleric, but also any master or teacher. In this case, the context suggests that he is using it in the sense ascribed to masters with (para)-religious knowledge and powers. *Ruhani* means spiritual; in all likelihood, as will be revealed later, he was translating "spiritualist/spiritist."

8 "*Sultan Murad'ın hal'i vukuunda ol vakit bu Kırlandi Paris'e giderek oradan Fransızlı manyetizmcı yani ruhani hocalarından birini bulup Dersaadet'e getirdi. Ol vakit ise Sultan Murad yine Çırağan Sarayı'nda ise de bu kadar girilip çıkılması sıkı değildi. Hasılı merhum Kırlandi getirdiği manyetizmcıyı bir takrip saraya soktu ve içeride ale'l-tahmin bir hafta on gün kadar durdu. Hasılı yaptığı şey Sultan Murad'a tesir edip iyi olduğunu söylediler. Yine bu getirdiği merhum manyetizmcıyı Kırlandi'nin hanesinde gördüm. İki yüz üç yüz lira ile bediye behiye olarak beş altı yüz lirayı bularak badebu yine merhum buradan yine Paris'e avdet eyledi.*"



5. Aziz Bey, the alleged leader of the committee organised to free Murad V from his prison. BOA, Y EE 23/9, May 1878.

Should we believe this claim? There are no traces of this in Scalieri's own account of Murad's sufferings; then again, why would he wish to reveal a detail that contradicted his claims that Murad was not truly mentally ill, but had been misdiagnosed by most physicians, starting with his own doctor Capoleone? Moreover, would it make sense to speak of an 'intervention' of such dubious nature in a publication, the aim of which was to convince the Western public

Ondan sonra artık Sultan Murad kendisini bilerek gayret edin hakkımı isterim diye Kırlandı'ye yazmaya Kırlandı dahi gayret ediyoruz kuvve-i cesime tedarikine çalışıyorum diye cevap yazmaya başladı" (DOA, Y EE 23/5, Interrogation minutes of the Scalieri-Aziz Bey committee members, Aziz Bey's declaration, 16 Recep 1295/16 July 1878; İ. H. Uzunçarşılı, "V. Murad'ı Tekrar Padişah Yapmak İsteyen Scalieri-Aziz Bey Komitesi", *Belleten*, 8/30 (1944), 260–261.

opinion of the legitimacy the deposed sultan's rights over the throne? Quite the contrary, Scalieri's account included details of how Abdülhamid himself had resorted to a much darker kind of magic:

While everyone, Muslims, Greeks, Armenians, and Jews, were imploring God for their beloved sovereign's recovery, Abdülhamid Efendi, who in the nineteenth century believed in, and practiced, so-called black magic, tried to put it to use with the help of demons to accelerate his brother's death. Among other magical feats Abdülhamid resorted to, I will mention two, the first before, and the other after, his accession to the throne.

By means of an arch-sorcerer (*sibir*[*baz*]*başı*)⁹ living in a neighbourhood of Sulukule in Istanbul, the name of which I cannot presently recall,¹⁰ but I remember very well that he was the son of a certain Kaşıkçı Ali Efendi, Abdülhamid, after having a miniature wax effigy made of his brother, Sultan Murad, stuck a multitude of pins into it, and then had it taken to the basement of this sorcerer, where every night the latter, sitting on the Koran, read [incantations] and conjured demons while at the same time beating the said wax body with a pomegranate tree stick.¹¹

As soon as he acceded to the throne, he summoned a great number of sorcerers from Arabia, whom he brought together with those of Constantinople, forming a regiment of about 180, whose monthly salaries reached one hundred Turkish liras per head. This regiment formed of Arabs and Turks, was divided in seven parts, placed in the same number of locations, namely one at Yıldız, one at Serence Bey Yokuşu, one at Valide Çeşme, one at Hayreddin İskelesi, one at Ortaköy, one at

9 *Sibirbaz* is a magician, or sorcerer and *başı* a generic suffix to indicate a head or chief. Scalieri's command of Turkish being limited, he seems to have been confused about the repetition of *baz* and *başı*, and mixed up *sibir* (magic, spell) with *şehir* (city) to come up with "schéhir-bache."

10 "Soulouklou" is evidently a misspelling for Sulukule, a neighbourhood by the city walls, near Edirnekapi. The reference to this neighbourhood is not surprising, considering that it was known for the presence — until today — of a strong Romani community, which was traditionally associated, among other stereotypes, with magic and fortune telling.

11 The pomegranate tree stick (*nar sopası*) seems to have been used to punish children. However, it also refers to an instrument used in various religious practices, from drawing yantras with a pomegranate stick (*anar ki kalam*) in Hinduism to Roman rituals where a curved stick (*inarculum*) would be placed upon the head of the person sacrificing an animal. According to the Egyptian Islamic scholar Al-Suyuti (1445–1505), djinns could be driven away by drawing an image of a demon and striking it with a pomegranate or quince tree stick. See V. François, "Objets du quotidien à Damas à l'époque ottoman", *Bulletin d'études orientales*, 61 (2012), 493.

Kabataş, and the other at Tophane; some were on the heights and others in the vicinity of Çırağan, so that these devil incarnates' breath (*nefes*)¹² might reach Sultan Murad's prison.

The reader will probably think that this is exaggerated or written out of resentment and enmity against Sultan Abdülhamid II's person. Far from it! I think of myself better than a slanderer; at any rate his engagement with magic is well known to all his courtiers and almost all of the Muslim people, and his stepmother Perestu Kadın is still alive to admit in all good conscience that she was despicably slandered by him to his uncle Abdülaziz and sent away from the palace because she was hostile to this profession and advised him not exercise it.¹³

There was still more to it. According to Scalieri, Abdülhamid was also endowed with the gift of divination, which he had allegedly demonstrated by predicting Abdülaziz's fall and Murad's short reign.¹⁴

Apparently, this was not the first time that poor Murad had been targeted using very similar methods. His uncle Abdülaziz had always been — probably with some reason — suspicious of his political ambitions and possible plans to have him overthrown. In rather typical fashion if we look at Ottoman history, many of the battles and rivalries between sultans and princes were waged through their households and, most particularly, their mothers.¹⁵ History has

12 *Nefes* (breath) is the typical embodiment of the supernatural power of a magician or of a saintly person, who may use it to cure, but also to harm, others.

13 Scalieri, *Appel à la justice internationale*, 24–25. Scalieri had a poor command of French, as suggested by many errors and awkward expressions throughout the text. While I have corrected blatant errors in my translation, I have also maintained some of its overall awkwardness.

14 Ibid. 26.

15 The role ascribed to women in Ottoman politics and power struggles needs to be carefully contextualised and not taken at face value, given the underlying misogyny that characterises both contemporary witnesses and later historians, up to the present. A typical example is that of the 'sultanate of women' (*kadınlar saltanatı*), as the prominent presence and influence of queen mothers in the seventeenth century was much later dubbed by historians such as Ahmed Refik [Altınay], who saw in this phenomenon one of the major causes of decline and decadence. Apart from the fact that this vision generally chooses to qualify as female forms of power that rest on male networks and interests, it is also compounded with the negative connotations associated with the 'womanly' character of their behaviour and of the means they used to attain their goals. This gendered vision will have them use their beauty and charms, engage in intrigues and tricks, and, of course, practice all sorts of magic and throw spells. The problem, however, is that, as is often the case, such stereotypes often

it that Abdülaziz's mother, Pertevniyal Valide Sultan (1812–83), was extremely protective of her 'lion' (*arslanım*), as she was known to call her son, and Selahaddin Efendi's writings abound with examples of her active efforts to curb Murad and his household's freedom and prerogatives. If we are to believe the recollections of one of his concubines, the day Abdülaziz was deposed and his harem ousted from the palace, the incoming inmates of Murad's harem had discovered proof of such malicious action in one of the cupboards of Pertevniyal's room:

The spell consisted of an effigy of approximately two spans, coarsely made of yellow beeswax. The name Murad had been written with red paint on its chest, back, head, kneecaps, and arms, and many needles had been stuck on it from the top down to the sole of its feet.¹⁶

As suggested by other examples, dolls may have been a common and popular way of putting a spell on a person, attesting to the use of what is lumped under the generic term of 'voodoo'.¹⁷

take the form of a self-fulfilling prophecy, if only because such groups whose power and freedom are seriously curtailed by the dominant one, will end up reproducing these clichés for lack of any alternative.

16 Z. Şakir, *Çırağan Sarayında 28 Sene: Beşinci Murad'ın Hayatı* (Istanbul 1943), 88. The word used is *heykel* (statue), rather than the more common *kukla* (doll). The book consists of the recollections of one of Murad's concubines, Filizten Kalfa, which the author Ziya Şakir Soku (1883–1959) obtained from interviews he conducted with her. Although Soku is often frowned upon as the prolific author of popular history books about the Hamidian period, his work is generally well documented. This publication is as close as one could come to a very basic form of oral history, which the absence of any scholarly work in the early decades of the Republic makes all the more precious.

17 Around 1810, an "Arab"—the term is ambiguous given its use both to denote an ethnic or cultural Arab and a black person—was caught slashing a child-sized doll representing Sultan Mahmud II with a razor, allegedly under instructions from the Wahhabi rebels in the Hejaz. See *İstanbul Ansiklopedisi*, s.v. "Büyücü Arab Vak'ası" (Reşad Ekrem Koçu). Three examples of such practices cannot tell us how widespread they truly were, nor if they may have been connected to African forms of magic. Such an investigation would by far exceed the scope of this study; suffice it to say that the practice of magic by black slave women is a recurrent theme in the literature. See Garnett, *The Women of Turkey*, Vol. 2, 415–417; Abdülaziz Bey, *Osmanlı Âdet, Merasim ve Tabirleri*, 2: 370–373; R. Davey, *The Sultan and His Subjects* (London 1907), 123–124; L. Hanoum, *Le Harem Impérial et les Sultanes au XIXe Siècle* (Paris 1925), 79–82; G. Young, *Constantinople* (London 1926), 261; Y. H. Er-

The spiritualist connection

While Scalieri was accusing Abdülhamid of practicing black magic to destroy Murad and Aziz Bey was suggesting that Scalieri had resorted to magnetism to save him, there was scant evidence available to corroborate one or the other of these claims. The closest one could come to an overlap with Aziz Bey's story was the account by Filizten of a visit by a physician sent by the British embassy to check on the ex-sultan. According to her, this doctor had come from abroad and was named Doni; she herself had helped him enter the secluded palace through the sewers, once he had said the password agreed upon, "Edward." He allegedly stayed for a whole week with Murad, examined him thoroughly and concluded that he was in excellent health.¹⁸ One could endlessly speculate about the name and identity of this physician: assuming that he was British, Donney, Downey, Dunny? The password was also meaningful, if one considers that Edward (1841–1910) was then Prince of Wales and, since 1874, grand master of the United Grand Lodge of England. Doctor Doni's visit may well have been the result of masonic solidarity between two princes.

My first revelation came when I discovered in the Ottoman archives a letter sent by Scalieri to Sultan Abdülhamid in 1888. The letter was surprising enough, as it revealed Scalieri's desire to mend his relations with the sultan by accepting the pardon he had apparently been granted. Yet, from the perspective of this study, it was the second paragraph of the letter that was particularly striking:

As a fervent adherent of the philosophy of spiritism, I could never sully my conscience by an odious and dishonest act, lie, or fail to keep my word. On the eve of departing this vain and false life, all my efforts aim only at bettering myself as much as I morally and intellectually can in this world, in view of ensuring my life after death, which is the only true and real one and in which I have unwavering faith.¹⁹

This was evidently a piece of information that could be connected to Aziz Bey's claim that Scalieri had arranged for the dispatching of a "magnetiser" to cure Sultan Murad, if only because magnetism was a generic term used to describe

dem, *Slavery in the Ottoman Empire and its Demise*, 1800–1909 (Basingstoke and London 1996), 174–176.

18 Şakir, *Çırağan Sarayında 28 Sene*, 146–151.

19 DOA, Y PRK EŞA 7/82, Cleanthi Scalieri's letter to Abdülhamid via Feridun Bey, Ottoman minister in Athens, 23 June/5 July 1888.

pseudo-medical interventions on the body and soul of a patient, which typically encompassed many similar belief systems including spiritualism and its French offshoot, spiritism. Magnetism, or animal magnetism as it was sometimes called, had been developed in the eighteenth century by the German physician Franz Anton Mesmer (1735–1815) as a form of alternative medicine, which claimed to cure patients by putting them in a trance induced by allegedly magnetic currents. By the mid-nineteenth century, even though there were still some magnetisers exercising this art, this fad had lost much of its popularity. It was gradually replaced by spiritualism, partly inspired by Mesmer's hypnotic techniques and Emanuel Swedenborg's (1688–1772) claims to establish contact with spirits. In Scalieri's case, the reference was explicitly to spiritism, a branch of spiritualism created in the 1850s by Hippolyte-Léon-Denizard Rivail (1804–69), better known under the pen name of Allan Kardec.

According to this current, which Kardec developed into a systematic doctrine by 1857, there existed immortal souls apart from the mortal body. These souls could be ranked from good to bad according to their degree of maturity. Contact with these souls could be established by individuals vested with this special skill, known as mediums. As such contacts could enable humanity to advance mentally and morally, spiritism would constitute a link between religion and science. Kardec had come up with the idea of turning his claims into a formal movement after the unexpected success of his first book, *Le Livre des esprits* (The Book of Spirits), published in 1857.²⁰ The doctrine spread rapidly through a specialised journal, *La Revue spirite*,²¹ the following year, and in 1861 *Le Livre des médiums* (The Book of Mediums).²² Thanks to its combination of religion and science, the new current attracted much attention from the wider public, spearheaded by some prestigious names, such as Napoleon III (1808–73),

20 A. Kardec, *Le Livre des esprits, contenant les principes de la doctrine spirite sur la nature des esprits, leur manifestation et leurs rapports avec les hommes; les lois morales, la vie présente, la vie future et l'avenir de l'humanité, écrit sous la dictée et publié par l'ordre d'esprits supérieurs* (Paris 1857).

21 *Revue spirite. Journal d'études psychologiques*. The journal was published from 1858 to 1914, 1914 to 1940, 1947 to 1976, 1989 to 2000, 2001 to 2019 and from 2020 to the present, with slightly differing titles https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/La_Revue_spirite.

22 A. Kardec, *Le Livre des médiums, ou Guide des médiums et des évocateurs, l'enseignement spécial des esprits de la théorie sur tous les genres de manifestations, les moyens de communiquer avec le monde invisible, le développement de la médiumnité, les difficultés et les écueils que l'on peut rencontrer dans la pratique du spiritisme, pour faire suite au Livre des esprits* (Paris 1861).

Victor Hugo (1802–85), Camille Flammarion (1842–1925), or Arthur Conan Doyle (1859–1930). Despite some slowing down after the 1920s, the fact that Spiritism still has six million members and twenty million sympathisers in Brazil certainly says something about its universal appeal.²³

It is in August 1888 that we find further confirmation of Scalieri's commitment to the doctrine in the *Revue spirite*, where his name appears among the "names of influential spiritists who have stated their faith," as residing in Athens.²⁴ Interestingly, Murad is also mentioned for the first time in an earlier issue of the same year, as a "spiritist figure," in a long list of monarchs, heads of state, and other prominent figures such as Victoria, Ludwig of Bavaria and presidents Lincoln and Thiers.²⁵ Even more surprisingly, the same issue seems to hold the key to the mysterious visit to the illustrious patient. At the end of a section devoted to the visit of Cuban delegates to Kardec's grave at the Père-Lachaise cemetery in Paris, one reads:

Another correspondent from the Orient, an intimate friend of *Sultan Murad*, who was cured of his obsession by the medium Duneau we had sent him, asked us at the same time to bring some flowers to Allan Kardec's tomb as a memento of this convinced and enlightened spiritist sultan.²⁶

It takes little imagination to guess that Murad's "intimate friend" was no other than Scalieri. More importantly, however, the medium's name sounds strangely familiar. Could Doni in Filizten's recollections have been a deformation of Duneau? If so, would it not make sense to conflate the two stories of the British doctor and of the French magnetiser to imagine that in reality Murad was visited by a spiritist medium named Duneau, who was dispatched from France thanks to Scalieri's mediation?

All this information allows us to decipher a cryptic mention that appeared in the *Revue spirite*'s January 1878 issue, as part of a retrospective assessment of the previous year:

23 See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spiritism>.

24 "Noms de spirites influents qui ont affirmé leur croyance", *Revue spirite. Journal d'études psychologiques et du spiritualisme expérimental*, 31/16 (15 August 1888), 496–497.

25 "Personnalités spirites", *Revue spirite*, 31/13 (1 July 1888), 390.

26 "Délégués cubains au Père-Lachaise", *Revue spirite*, 31/13 (1 July 1888), 398.

Healing mediums multiply everywhere, which is of great benefit to our cause; [...] in Paris, there are some who do not wish to be mentioned, and one of them was recently called to Constantinople, where he cured of a terrible obsession a great, very great, figure, who had been condemned by the most renowned doctors of Europe.²⁷

An incredible story

Apparently, the secret had been well kept for ten years; it would take another six years for the details to surface, again in the same journal, at the end of 1894. Interestingly, the matter was presented almost like an afterthought, provoked by the death, on 19 October 1894, of Marie Leüe, “universally honoured” in Constantinople, thanks to whom “some twenty-five years ago, the major pashas were engaged in spiritism.” Her influence seemed to have reached to the highest levels: “Sultan *Murad* most particularly revered Mme. M. Leüe; he considered her a loyal counsellor, with a broad and fair mind.”²⁸ This demise was what triggered a four-page digression on Duneau’s visit to Murad.

Although this account was unsigned, a second version of it, published in the same journal in 1897, reveals that it was by Pierre-Gaëtan Leymarie (1827–1901), who had succeeded Kardec at the head of the movement after the latter’s death in 1869. Leymarie recalled that Scalieri had visited him “three months after Murad’s accession,” so probably upon his deposition in September 1876. Visibly troubled and depressed, Scalieri had told him about the latest developments in Istanbul. Insisting that Murad had had nothing to do with the coup that had toppled Abdülaziz, he recounted how, during the ceremony of presentation of state officials, Murad had expressly requested his presence, called him to his side and hugged him, provoking the ire of the “powerful party of the old Turks.” If we are to believe Scalieri, this unprecedented embrace was the Sultan’s way of showing that he sided with his Greek subjects, “men of progress, who can revive literature, politics, arts, and science [...] as the antithesis of the old Turks and their stagnation.”

That evening, the sultan had invited his most loyal supporters, of course including Scalieri, to discuss the future of the empire. At some point, he entered a form of trance and in an ominous voice, said: “At this very moment, they are assassinating such and such ministers in such and such way; horror, horror!” be-

27 “Coup d’œil rétrospectif pour l’année 1877”, *Revue spirite*, 21/1 (January 1878), 5.

28 “Nécrologie”, *Revue spirite*, 37/12 (December 1894), 729–730.

Le Journal illustré

TRIZIÈME ANNÉE — N° 24

DIMANCHE 25 JUIN 1876

PRIX DU NUMERO : 15 CENTIMES

L'Annuaire des universités de saint Mérand, par René Meyer. — Les Fêtes d'Alarbone, par Testamand. — L'Arc-en-ciel du genre de Larchamp, par René Meyer. — Sur un objet : Sauter à la poutre d'une manière, tableau de Gerdine, dessin de Gerdine Lucie-Eve. — La Galatienne en camp de la Vallée, par René Meyer. — Nos Mémoires de la Fête annuelle.

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CONSTANTINOPLE : Assassinat des ministres du sultan MOURAD V

Dessin de HENRI MEYER, d'après le croquis de M. Petrucci. — Voir les détails dans la *Chronique*, page 200.

6. Artist's rendition of the attack by Çerkes Hasan against the Cabinet of ministers on 15 June 1876. *Journal illustré*, 25 June 1876. Author's collection.

fore breaking into tears. This was evidently a reference to the assault by Çerkes Hasan Bey on the Cabinet, which left several ministers dead, in retaliation for Abdülaziz's death. [Ill. 6] Terrified of being accused of crimes he had not condoned, Murad spent a troubled night, only to be informed the following day of his uncle's suicide. The news triggered a breakdown, leaving him prostrated and catatonic, branded as insane by his family and grandees alike, until he was deposed by his brother a few days later.

The chronology of events was wrong. The attack on the Cabinet had taken place *after* Abdülaziz's death, and it had taken a full three months for the government to opt for Murad's destitution. At any rate, Murad was interned in a palace with his household of 400 persons, isolated from the outer world, and in a state of "obsession" that left him with "clenched fists, crazed eyes, roaming the palace and forgetting the most basic principles of hygiene." His desperate mother managed to keep contact with Scalieri and asked him to go to Coursan, in southern France, where the "invisibles" had let her know that a gardener by

the name of Jeoffre possessed the capacities of a healing medium and would be able to cure Murad.²⁹

Scalieri did find Jeoffre, but as the gardener-medium was too afraid of the risks involved, he had decided to reach out to Leymarie. It was Leymarie who introduced him to Duneau, “a powerful healer,” who accepted the challenge and set out for Istanbul.

A handsome and tall young man of athletic stature, Duneau looked at the Sultan, magnetized or hypnotized him, and Murad, who was also of herculean size, feeling his beneficial influence, obeyed him. Duneau decongested him, had him open his hands that had remained clenched for four months and a half and whose nails had penetrated the skin, and Murad, who had remained silent for so many days, said: “Thank you, you are doing me good.”

Duneau’s treatment continued with a bath, for which he had to threaten two servants with a whip so that they would accept to touch his sacred body. As Murad stood up, refusing to enter the bath, he had to use a powerful trick to have him lie in the tub. He then massaged, magnetised, decongested, and anointed him with precious oils, and Murad was revived. Duneau ordered a hearty meal and excellent wine, and Murad, regaining his appetite, engaged in a lively conversation. The following day, he had recovered so well that he played the piano and sang in presence of an amazed assembly of harem women, whom, against all rules, he ordered to dance unveiled in presence of the foreigner. Intrigued by the sounds of rejoicing, the guards finally became aware of Duneau’s presence and asked that he be surrendered. They refused and the women guarded him day and night to keep him in the palace.

The time he spent there was put to excellent use: Duneau initiated Murad to the art of fencing. Within twenty days, he had fully recovered, and the news had spread to the city, where his supporters openly rejoiced. Duneau had to escape the palace and hide for a month; when he came back, he could proudly observe that Murad was again capable of ruling. His mission accomplished, Duneau returned to Paris, only to die of a sudden illness; Scalieri had had to flee Istanbul and lead a life of exile in Athens; as to Murad, despite his full recovery,

29 “M. Jeoffre, à Coursan (Aude), médium guérisseur”, *Revue spirite*, 31/16 (15 August 1888), 496.

he ended up buried alive in his palatial prison: “For him, the hour of power has not yet struck on the dial of time.”³⁰

Three years later, a slightly different version of the same story was published in the journal, this time under Leymarie’s name. The differences were minimal, mostly stylistic. The reason for the repetition was the publication by Paul de Réglà — Paul-André Desjardin’s pen name — of a book on the “secrets of Yıldız,” a long pamphlet against Abdülhamid and in defence of Murad.³¹ Leymarie was disappointed to see that the author had not used this story, which he had personally told him, and felt the need to tell it again. For the rest, there were a few additions, such as a mention of how Duneau had escalated the walls of the palace, established “fluidic contact” with his patient, magnetised each of his meals, taught him boxing on top of fencing, and details concerning Murad’s expression of gratitude: “You do me good, and I love you; thanks to you and I can finally express myself. You come from the beautiful land of France, the great country of thinkers.” He had also corrected some inconsistencies in the chronology of events and slightly changed Murad’s ‘premonition’ upon his accession.³²

Doubts and hard evidence

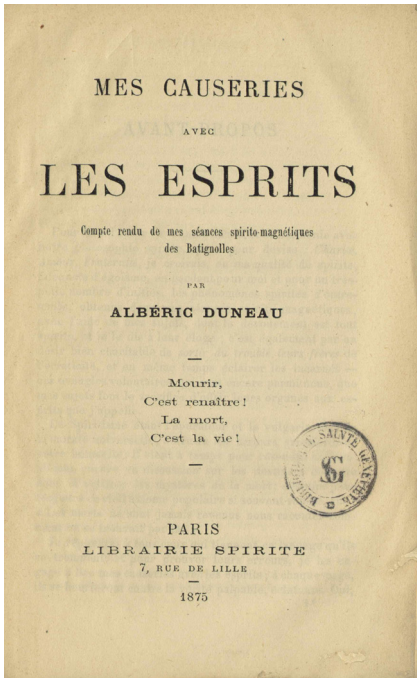
There is no need to discuss the veracity of all the claims made in this account. Evidently, Scalieri had been engaging in a great deal of self-promotion, probably exaggerating his degree of intimacy and friendship with the sultan. He clearly also sought to present Murad as a person with great spiritist potential, including a capacity to sense events taking place at a distance and the gift of premonition. As to the description of the medium’s “fluidic” energy and healing powers, it would be futile to enter a discussion on this very particular and esoteric topic.

Nevertheless, I believe that following the saying that there is no smoke without fire, at least some of this information is likely to be trustworthy and possibly

30 *Revue spirite*, 37/12 (December 1894), 730–733.

31 P. de Réglà, *Les Secrets d’Yildiz* (Paris 1897).

32 P.G. Leymarie, “Les secrets d’Yildiz,” *Revue spirite. Journal d’études psychologiques*, 40/1 (1 January 1897), 34–38. The newer version of Murad’s premonition was as follows: “Those despicable men! Yesterday, they assassinated my beloved uncle Abdülaziz. Now, they are stabbing the new ministers. Tomorrow they will say: ‘Murad, assassin of his uncle, has gotten rid of those who were in the way!’ They are going to incriminate me, and I am innocent of all the blood that has been shed” (ibid., 36).



7. Cover page of Albéric Duneau's *Causeries avec les esprits*, 1875. Sainte-Geneviève Library, Paris.

of some use. It seems highly unlikely that the basic plot behind the story was a pure fabrication. Despite obvious disparities, the convergence of three completely independent testimonies — Aziz Bey's, Filizten's, and Leymarie's — make it practically impossible to deny the fact that Murad was indeed visited and probably treated by a person sent from abroad. The parallelism between the reference to a magnetiser and the story of a spiritist intervention would tend to discredit the concubine's version of a British physician, which we can attribute to a common confusion between French and English, or simply to the secrecy that surrounded the arrangement.³³ Moreover, we know that Duneau — Albéric Duneau — was indeed a medium, who authored in 1875 a book on his “conversations with spirits,” an account of his spiritist sessions in the Parisian neighbourhood of les Batignolles.³⁴ [Ill. 7] In the face of all this evidence,

33 The mention of the password “Edward” — how and why would one invent that? — is a detail that weakens this dismissal.

34 A. Duneau, *Mes causeries avec les esprits. Compte rendu de mes séances spirito-magnétiques des Batignolles* (Paris 1875). My attempts to find a trace of Duneau's passage in the Ottoman Archives have rather predictably failed.

we have no reason to doubt that Scalieri did indeed embark upon a mission to France in order to secure the help of his spiritist 'brethren' in saving Murad from the state of destitution in which he had found himself.

This is also true of some of the details in Leymarie's account, which deserve some attention. Particularly striking is the way in which, in the second version, Murad is said to have spoken about his uncle's assassination, a statement which runs counter to the claim by most of his champions that Abdülaziz had committed suicide and echoes the accusations which Abdülhamid would revive in the Yıldız trial of 1881 to eliminate Midhat Pasha and the other authors of the 1876 coup. Considering that Leymarie's account was based on Scalieri's claims, one could assume that the latter had no reason to present such a version of the facts unless there was some truth to it, not necessarily in the sense of the event itself, but at least of Murad's perception of it. On a different matter, if we accept that Duneau did visit, examine, and treat the deposed sultan in Istanbul, we may obviously question the alleged efficacy of his healing, but still take into consideration the details concerning the initial state of his health. Clenched fists, a vacant gaze, a lack of hygiene, aimless wandering, constitute details, which, combined with other sources of information such as medical reports, may turn out to be useful if one were to engage in a thorough reconsideration and possible reconstitution of Murad's psychotic episode.³⁵

The question remains of understanding how exactly Scalieri, and if we are to believe the *Revue spirite*, Murad, came into contact with the world of spiritism. In Scalieri's case, it may seem strange that no mention of his affiliation should appear before 1888, especially if one considers that his visit to Leymarie in 1876 seems to have been of a 'fraternal' nature. This is all the more surprising if one considers that ever since 1861, the movement's journal had been publishing information about the spreading of the doctrine in the Ottoman capital.³⁶ Two names came up very frequently: B. Repos, a lawyer, who seems to have been

35 Murad was examined by numerous physicians, most notably the famed Viennese alienist Maximilian Leidesdorf (1818–89) who was invited to Istanbul and spent two weeks at Dolmabahçe Palace before submitting a report to the government. Nevertheless, no real attempt has been made to revisit this famous medical case, other than listing the few reports that were issued and published until and immediately after the sultan's deposition.

36 In 1869, it noted that "almost the entirety of the followers was composed of French, Italians, and Greeks" (*Revue spirite*, 12/2 (1 February 1869), 39).

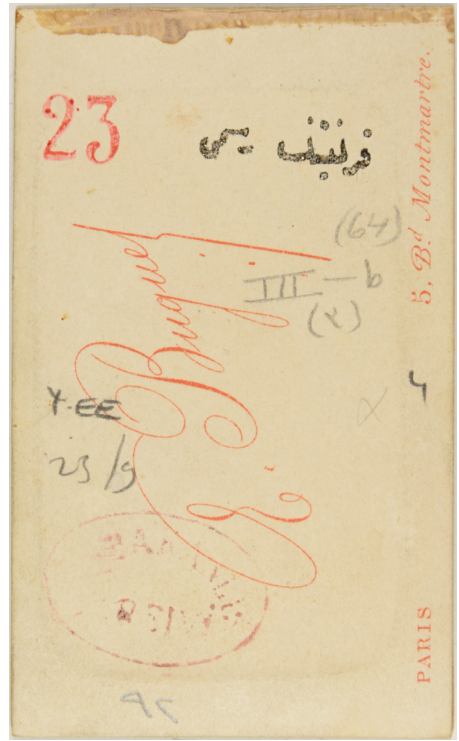
very active from 1858 to 1870;³⁷ and the Leüe couple — Marie, née Lyonnard, and Wilhelm — who had allegedly been very close to Murad.³⁸ The fact that Scalieri was never mentioned until 1888 makes one wonder if this was not an attempt to integrate him *ex post facto*, perhaps upon his own request, for the purpose of consistency regarding Murad's treatment by Duneau.

And yet, I have found the most unexpected evidence of Scalieri's early involvement with spiritism in the most unexpected of places. A file in the Ottoman archives — originally an envelope — contains the photographs of ten members of the "Aziz Bey committee," who had attempted to rescue Murad from his prison.³⁹ One of these photographs was identified on the back as Scalieri's (*Kırlantı'nın resmi*); however, there was something very peculiar about it. It was of rather mediocre quality, showing Scalieri wearing a coat, sitting at a pedestal table on which his left arm rested. What was strange was that the right side of the image was filled with a second, much blurrier figure, a bearded man wrapped in a white cloth, who seemed to be looking down towards the unsuspecting Scalieri. The quality of the image makes it impossible to distinguish the

37 The first mention of B. Repos dates from July 1861, when a letter he addressed to Allan Kardec on 28 May was published in the *Revue spirite*. In it, Repos spoke of the gradual progress of the doctrine in Constantinople, and of successful experiments conducted by the members of the small community (*Revue spirite*, 4/7 (1 July 1861), 206–8). It is through his widow's obituary in 1896 that we learn that Repos had led the first spiritist group of Constantinople, between 1858 and 1870, which suggests that he may have died at the latter date. An "old friend of Allan Kardec", Repos was an "inspired poet and a drawing medium" (*Revue spirite*, 39/6 (1 June 1896), 381).

38 Wilhelm Leüe was a tailor of civilian outfits and military uniforms, whose shop was located at number 410 of Pera's main street (Grand-rue de Péra), just across from the church of Santa Maria Draperis (*L'Indicateur ottoman. Annuaire-almanach du commerce, de l'industrie, de l'administration et de la magistrature* (Constantinople: Cervati Frères et D. Fatzea, 1881), p. 208). We have already seen that upon her death in 1894 — or rather the "disengagement of her spirit from matter," as the journal had it — the *Revue spirite* mentioned the close relationship between this woman and Sultan Murad, and then moved on to recount the story of the sultan's healing session with Duneau. In 1898, her husband Wilhelm's death in Athens became the occasion to remind once again the readers of the couple's "very intimate" friendship with Murad, and that, "consequently, their business was twice destroyed by fire" ("Nécrologie", *Revue spirite*, 41/7 (1 July 1898), 445–446).

39 BOA, Y EE 23/9. The envelope bears the mention of "the photographs of Murad Efendi's partisans" (*Murad Efendi taraftarı bulunanların resimleri*). The use of "Efendi" (prince) as Murad's title is a typical example of the Hamidian efforts to downgrade the former sultan to the status of a prince.



8. (a) Spiritist portrait of Cleanthi Scalieri. Photograph by Édouard Buguet, ca 1875. BOA, Y EE, 23/9.
 (b) Buguet's name and address on the back of Cleanthi Scalieri's portrait, ca 1875. BOA, Y EE, 23/9. The inscription in Turkish reads "Kırlanti'nin resmi."

features of the evanescent man, or even to guess whether he is bareheaded or perhaps wearing a fez. [Ill. 8 a-b]

Of course, the blurred image of a man wrapped in a white sheet immediately evokes a rather coarse rendition of an ectoplasmic creature, unexpected as this may seem in a file probably kept by Abdülhamid's police or henchmen. Was there any possibility that this image may have something to do with spiritism? The name and address of the photographer on the back confirmed my wildest speculations: E. Buguet, 5, B^d Montmartre, Paris. Indeed, Jean Buguet (1840–1901), who worked under the name of Édouard Buguet, was a photographer whose specialty was exactly that: *photographie spirite*, or "spiritist photography." [Ill. 9] Buguet's sales pitch was the claim that he could conjure the spirits of his sitters' loved ones and capture their image on the same glass negative. Buguet had established contact with spiritist circles, most notably with Kardec's widow



9. Portrait of Édouard [Jean] Buguet, spiritist photographer.
Revue spirite, 17/5 (May 1874), p. 147.

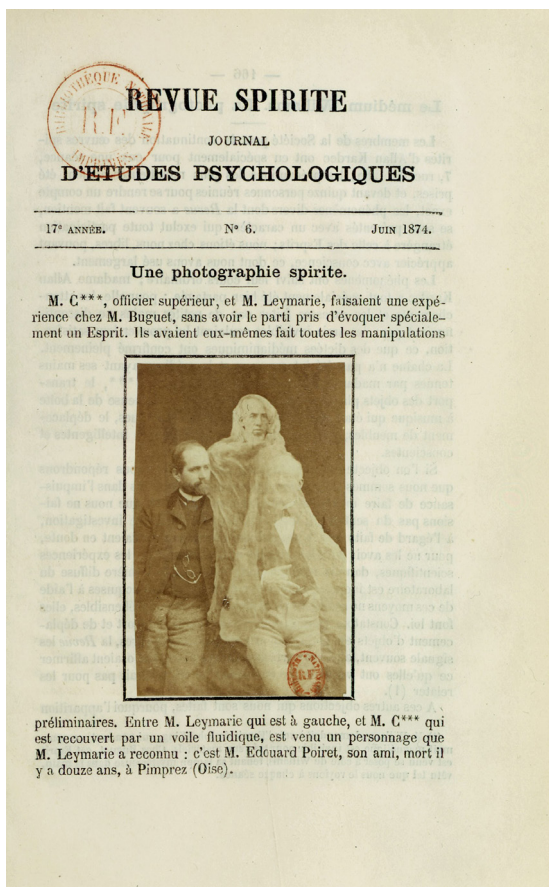
and his successor, Leymarie.⁴⁰ The latter had even placed on the cover of the *Revue spirite* a photograph taken by Buguet of himself with his long-deceased friend Édouard Poiret.⁴¹ [Ill. 10] Yet what brought even greater celebrity to Buguet and makes it relatively easy to trace his career is that he was tried for fraud in June 1875 and sentenced to one year in prison and a fine of 500 francs.

The proceedings of the trial and its repercussions in the press had revealed the details of Buguet's technique.⁴² Whenever he received a client, he would ask

⁴⁰ A precursor of Buguet in the 1860s was the American photographer William H. Mumler (1832–84). In 1874 and 1875, the *Revue spirite* published a series of articles on “spiritist photography,” many of which amounted to a publicity for Buguet: “La photographie spirite à Paris,” *Revue spirite*, 17/1 (January 1874), 6–9; “La photographie spirite,” 17/2 (February 1874), 50–52; 17/4 (April 1874), 123–124; “Une photographie spirite,” 17/6 (June 1874), 165–172; 17/7 (July 1874), 212 bis; 17/8 (August 1874), 260 bis; 17/9 (September 1874), 276 bis; 17/10 (October 1874), 308 bis; “Discussion au sujet de la photographie spirite,” 17/9 (September 1874), 269–272; “Comment on devient médium photographe. Quelques preuves d'identité,” 17/10 (October 1874), 309–311; “Expériences de photographies spirites, par un chimiste,” 17/11 (November 1874), 340–342; “Une visite chez M. Buguet, photographe spirite,” 17/12 (December 1874), 372–374; “Désir matériel; vision réalisée par un fait,” 378 bis–ter; “Une photographie spirite,” 18/2 (February 1875), 52 bis–ter; 132 bis–132 ter; “Photographie spirite,” 18/10 (October 1875) 325–330; On Buguet and spirit(ist) photography, see J. W. Monroe, *Laboratories of Faith. Mesmerism, Spiritism and Occultism in Modern France* (Ithaca and London 2008), 162–185; S. Natale, *Supernatural Entertainments. Victorian Spiritualism and the Rise of Modern Media Culture* (Pennsylvania 2016), 138–144.

⁴¹ “Une photographie spirite,” *Revue spirite*, 17/6 (1874), 165.

⁴² For the trial minutes, see P.G. Leymarie (ed.), *Procès des spirites* (Paris 1875); “Le procès des spirites,” *Revue des grands procès contemporains*, 5 (1887), 71–143.



10. Portrait of Pierre-Gaëtan Leymarie and his deceased friend Édouard Poiret. Photograph by Édouard Buguet, 1874. *Revue spirite*, 17/6 (June 1874), p. 165.

whose spirit he wished to see, and then retire for a few minutes in a backroom where he kept an archive of hundreds of headshots pasted on cardboard, from which he picked a convenient one, which he attached to the top of a wooden dummy wrapped in tulle. He would then take a shot of the 'spirit' and bring the glass negative back into the studio and take the client's image on the same plate.⁴³

⁴³ For examples of accounts drawn from the trial minutes or articles in the press, see C. Dupuis, "Les mystères de la science", *Le Chercheur. Journal mensuel illustré des inventions nouvelles*, 3/7 (1888), 49–50; A. Praviel, "Le photographe des fantômes", *Lectures pour tous*, (February 1929), 69–78; (March 1929), 65–74; (April 1929), 38–48; A. Praviel, "L'affaire Buguet: le photographe spirite des fantômes", *Revue belge* (1 January 1931), 20–145. For more recent sources, see F. Gettings, *Ghosts in Photographs. The Extraordinary Story of Spirit Photography* (New York 1978); R. H. Krauss, *Beyond Light and Shadow* (Munich 1995); M.

The available evidence suggested that Scalieri felt attracted enough by the process to engage Buguet's services. The date is unclear, but we can be sure that it was not during his visit to Leymarie in late 1876, considering that Buguet had by then been convicted and forced to put an end to his trade. Given that his studio on boulevard Montmartre appears in Parisian commercial directories for the first time in 1874 and for the last, in 1876, it seems reasonable to assume that Buguet's activity at that address — and consequently, Scalieri's visit — must have taken place from mid-1873 to mid-1875, the latter being the date of his trial.⁴⁴ As to the alleged identity of the spectral apparition on the photograph, one can only try to guess: his father, an influent relative or mentor, or perhaps the person who initiated him to Freemasonry...

The bigger picture

Did this photographic encounter in Paris mark the beginning of Scalieri's engagement with spiritualism? It is difficult to say, but at least it proves that by 1876, when Leymarie claimed to have met him, he had at least been exposed and was sympathetic to some of the teachings of the doctrine. On the other hand, what seems much more doubtful is Murad's involvement in spiritism. This is not to deny that such an interest could have developed in the prince's mind, especially considering his penchant for things Western and modern. After all, if Scalieri managed to pull him into Freemasonry, one should not exclude the possibility that spiritism may have had a similar appeal on him, given that it was widely acknowledged as a scientific venture and promoted as such by some of the greatest minds of the time in the Western world. Moreover, as I have previously shown, the *Revue spirite* was proud to advertise Murad's affiliation on several occasions apart from Duneau's healing session, most notably through his alleged friendship with the spiritist couple of Marie and Wilhelm Leüe.

It is widely understood that there existed a spiritist network in Istanbul, and likely in other cities of the Ottoman Empire and the *Revue spirite* was there to publicise this information, as part of the movement's claim to universal appeal. Several colleagues have previously written on the topic. Thierry Zarcone, focus-

Sweet, "They Saw Dead People", *The Independent on Sunday* (23 December 2001), 19–21.

A virtual museum on the topic is also available at <https://www.photographymuseum.com/believe1.html>.

⁴⁴ *Annuaire-almanach du commerce et de l'industrie, de la magistrature et de l'administration* (Paris 1873, 1874, 1875, 1876, 1877).

ing mostly on forms of esotericism in Islam, mentioned the presence in Izmir/Smyrna in the early 1860s of a follower of magnetism, an Armenian by the name of Calouste Constant.⁴⁵ However, the articles he referred to, while providing extremely interesting details concerning local healing practices, did not reveal any Western-inspired movement, except for Constant's self-proclaimed allegiance to magnetism.⁴⁶ The most comprehensive and thorough treatment of the question can be found in Alexandre Toumarkine's *habilitation* monograph, which covers the question of spiritism in the Ottoman Empire and Turkey, from the 1850s to the end of the twentieth century.⁴⁷ Most recently, Özgür Türesay has published an excellent article that covers about half a century of spiritist activity in the Ottoman Empire, from the 1860s to the early 1910s, with particular emphasis on the role played by Ottoman Muslims — Turks, as it were — towards the end of this period.⁴⁸

There is little I can add to Toumarkine's and Türesay's findings. Nevertheless, some meaningful information can be gathered that complement these observations, especially with respect to the 1870s and 1880s, much less covered by these authors, and which also correspond to the period during which Scalieri seems to have been particularly active. For example, an item in the *Revue spirite* of February 1875 mentions, based on a letter received from Madame Leüe, that a certain Şevket Pasha, governor of a province, had received from Buguet — the spiritist photographer — a photograph of his deceased father, which many in his entourage had immediately recognised, and that one Mehmed Pasha had also gone through a similar experience. "The doctrine advances with giant steps," added Leüe, "and many families engage in spiritism secretly, for they fear being

45 T. Zarcone, "Occultism in an Islamic Context. The Case of Modern Turkey from the Nineteenth Century to the Present Time", in H. Bogdan and G. Djurdjevic (eds.), *Occultism in a Global Perspective* (London and New York 2014), 158–159.

46 "Les extatiques d'Amassia", *Le Magnétiseur*, 4/9 (15 December 1862), 130–133; "Le magnétisme en Turquie. L'okoudmak, l'agothèle", *Le Magnétiseur*, 4/11 (15 February 1863), 162–171.

47 A. Toumarkine, "Le spiritisme, un ésotérisme sécularisé dans l'Empire ottoman et en Turquie: des hommes, des esprits et des livres entre Orient et Occident", monographie présentée en vue de l'habilitation à diriger des recherches (Paris: Écoles des hautes études en sciences sociales, 2016). Toumarkine is the only researcher to have come across the information about Scalieri and Murad in the *Revue spirite* (Toumarkine, "Le spiritisme", 32, 41–44).

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

ridiculed by materialists.”⁴⁹ That spiritism was a matter of interest in Istanbul at the time, at least among the foreign and Westernised communities of the city, can be ascertained from frequent references in the most influent French-language newspaper in the capital, the *Stamboul*. Public sessions were held in theatres by visiting ‘specialists,’ such as a Professor Wells, who gave an “informative and entertaining” show of “mnemotechnics, electrobiology, optical illusions, phrenology, physiognomy and clairvoyance, spiritism, etc.” in Kadıköy,⁵⁰ suggesting that the ‘doctrine’ was not taken very seriously, but rather considered as a performance of magic, not to say a circus act. Interestingly, most of the items that appeared in the newspaper took the form of indictments against spiritism and its performers, considered to be charlatans. In November 1875, the daily published in extenso a report by the Society of Physics of Saint Petersburg University, which came to the damning conclusion that “spiritist phenomena derive from unconscious movements or conscious deceptions, and [that] the spiritist doctrine was a superstition.”⁵¹ A year later, an even longer piece, spread over two issues, provided a scathing assessment of spiritism, revealing the ‘techniques’ employed by a number of conmen who had recently been exposed in Europe.⁵² In 1881, an article by one Maurice Français, ‘borrowed’ from the French *Voltaire*, displayed a rather sarcastic attitude towards Kardec and Leymarie.⁵³

The 1880s were marked by a particularly striking frequency of performances in the domain, clearly dominated by a sceptical tone, due to the predominance of representatives of the anti-spirit(ual)ist movement, particularly of the illusionist vein.⁵⁴ The first of these was Marius Cazeneuve (1839–1913),

49 *Revue spirite*, 18/2 (1 February 1875), 52 ter. The only governor by the name of Şevket Pasha at around this time is the governor of İşkodra/Shkodër, who died in this post in November 1873. Other than that, one could perhaps think of Ahmed Şevket Bey (1827–78), who was mayor (*şehremini*) of Istanbul in March-May 1874. As to pashas by the name of Mehmed, they are too numerous to allow for any form of verification. At any rate, it is clear that Madame Leüé’s claims need to be taken with a grain of salt, given her enthusiasm for the movement.

50 *Stamboul* (8 October 1875), 2; (9 October 1875), 4.

51 “Causerie scientifique: le spiritisme”, *Stamboul* (5 November 1875), 2–3.

52 Ibid. (26 September 1876), 2–3; (18 October 1876), 2–3.

53 M. Français, “Un voyage au pays des esprits”, *Stamboul* (17 August 1881), 2–3. Although the *Stamboul* made no mention of it, Maurice Français was the editor of the *Voltaire*, and this article had been published in his newspaper ten days earlier, on 8 August.

54 There were several anti-spiritualist currents at the time. One was Christian, mostly Catholic, anti-spiritualism, which understandably tried to expose the blasphemous nature of the

AKA *commandeur* Cazeneuve, who, while known primarily as an illusionist/magician (*prestidigitateur*), also contributed to the anti-spiritist cause.⁵⁵ Cazeneuve came to Istanbul in August 1881, where he performed at the Théâtre des Petits-Champs, in Pera, apparently with great success.⁵⁶ Three years later, the *Stamboul* announced the arrival of the famous “chained mediums, Thorn and Darwin.”⁵⁷ [Ill. 11] They eventually arrived in late March of the following year from Vienna, with a slightly different setup: Darwin was not there; in-

doctrine. Another important current was grounded in science, which it sought to use to debunk shams and tricksters. The showiest of all was that of individuals who were convinced that spiritualists were scammers but intended to prove it by reproducing the same tricks by using their skills as magicians or illusionists, thus revealing the fraud. Of course, the major advantage of this form of anti-spiritualism was that it could be turned into a spectacle, often in combination with more conventional forms of magic. Interestingly, this phenomenon was in many ways linked to the development of cinema, especially with the work of some ‘magicians,’ such as Georges Méliès. On the topic, see E. W. Dyson, “‘Gentleman Mountebanks’ and Spiritualists: Legal, Stage and Media Contest Between Magicians and Spirit Mediums in the United States and England”, in S. Willburn and T. Kontou (eds), *The Ashgate Research Companion to Nineteenth-Century Spiritualism and the Occult* (Farnham and Burlington 2012), 231–266; S. Natale, “Spiritualism Exposed: Scepticism, Credulity and Spectatorship in End-of-the-Century America”, *European Journal of American Culture*, 29/2 (2010), 131–144; F. Tabet and P. TAILLEFERT, “Influence de l’occulte sur les formes magiques: l’anti-spiritisme spectaculaire, des *Spectres* d’Henri Robin au *Spiritisme abraca-dabrant* de Georges Méliès”, 1895. *Mille huit-cent quatre-vingt-quinze. Revue de l’association française sur l’histoire du cinéma*, 76 (2015), 94–117.

55 Cazeneuve’s international fame was such that he performed before the major sovereigns of Europe, including Abdülaziz in 1866. His career took an extraordinary turn when he landed in Madagascar in 1886, with the mission of using his skills to impress Queen Ranavalona III and turn her away from the British in favour of France. Cazeneuve’s own account of this ‘diplomatic’ victory provides us with his definition of the ‘anti-spiritist’ nature of some of his ‘experiments’: “I label these experiments *anti-spiritist* because those who perform them, or at least perform things that come close to them, claim that they can only be done in the dark and with the complicity of spirits. However, as I do not believe that spirits, if they exist, would abandon ethereal spheres just to amuse gawking crowds, I insist on proving that one can realise these experiments and others of the same kind in plain day, without resorting to other means than those provided by science and study”. See M. Cazeneuve, *À la cour de Madagascar. Magie et diplomatie* (Paris 1896), 131.

56 *Stamboul* (6 August 1881), 2; (8 August 1881), 1; (9 August 1881), 2; (18 August 1881), 2.

57 Ernest Thorn (1853–1923), born Abraham Moses Thorn in Jarosław, was a famous magician, who started his career in the 1870s together with his brother, Heinrich/Henry Thorn (1857–1943), AKA as Darwin. Under the name of Thorn and Darwin, they toured Europe and the world in the 1880s, under the trademarks of the ‘Royal Illusionists,’ or the ‘Exposers



11. "Thorn and Darwin's Startling Phenomena," 1880s. Colour lithograph poster, 108.8 x 77.6 cm. <https://www.sothebys.com/en/buy/auction/2021/the-ricky-jay-collection/thorn-ernest-chevalier-moses-abraham-thorn-and>

stead, Thorn was accompanied by a certain Homes and one Miss Fey.⁵⁸ They performed in a series of “anti-spiritist sessions” (*séances d'anti-spiritisme*)⁵⁹ with such success that on 24 April, they were asked to perform at the palace, in presence of Abdülhamid, the imperial princes, and the sultan's immediate entourage. Apparently, the sovereign asked for the ‘turning table’ trick to be repeated three times.⁶⁰ The team's performances went on throughout the summer, in Bursa, Prinkipo/Büyüka, Samatya, and Büyükdere,⁶¹ and Thorn even got married to Julie Zucker (ca 1869–1919) at the synagogue of Yüksek Kaldırım, in Galata.⁶² Meanwhile, Cazeneuve had returned to the Ottoman capital with a program consisting of a series of attractions, each of which had been created for sovereigns and princes of Europe and the Middle East.⁶³ On 20 July, he performed at the palace, catching in his mouth previously marked bullets that were fired at him, to the delight of Sultan Abdülhamid, who bestowed upon him the third class insignia of the Mecidiye order.⁶⁴ Such was his success that he was summoned again to Yıldız three days later, for a performance that lasted four hours,⁶⁵ and a third time on 4 August, in a session to which the Grand Vizier and all the ministers had been invited and were asked to participate in a series

of Spiritualism’. See “Ernest Thorn”: https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ernest_Thorn; “Magician's Blood”: <https://ourgame.mlblogs.com/magicians-blood-81af2e4f0ec2>.

58 Miss Fey was probably Anna Eva Fay Pingree (1851–1927), born Ann Eliza Heathman in Ohio, a famous medium and stage mentalist (“Anna Eva Fay”: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anna_Eva_Fay), who started as a spiritualist but shifted to anti-spiritualism and mind reading when her tricks were exposed in 1876 by Washington Irving Bishop. She eventually confessed to Harry Houdini all the deceptions she had used throughout her career. As to Homes, who is not to be confused with the famous Daniel Dunglas Home (1833–86), one of the most celebrated mediums of the Victorian age, I have not been able to find any satisfactory information as to his identity and career. For a broadside advertising a performance by Thorn, Darwin, Homes, and Fey at the Hotel de Saxe, in Dresden, on Sunday, 30 November [1884], see <https://www.lotsearch.net/auction-catalogues/the-christian-fechner-collection-of-american-english-magic-part-i-123174?perPage=20&page=14&orderBy=lot-title&order=DESC>.

59 *Stamboul* (27 March 1885), 1; (30 March 1885), 2; (31 March 1885), 1; (1 April 1885), 1; (2 April 1885), 1; (7 April 1885), 2; (8 April 1885), 1.

60 “Séance d'anti-spiritisme au palais”, *Stamboul* (25 April 1885), 1.

61 *Stamboul* (25 May 1885), 2; (29 May 1885), 1; (5 June 1885), 3; (6 June 1885), 3; (1 July 1885), 2.

62 *Stamboul*, 19 September 1885), 2.

63 *Stamboul*, (10 July 1885), 1; (11 July 1885), 2; (17 July 1885), 1; (21 July 1885), 2.

64 *Stamboul*, (21 July 1885), 1.

65 *Stamboul* (25 July 1885), 2.

of ‘miraculous’ tricks, from mind reading to disappearing objects, with musical interludes by the imperial band and a young and gifted Armenian pianist by the name of Satenik Golmanoff.⁶⁶ In late September, the two stars of magic were brought together in a performance at the Greek school of Hasköy.⁶⁷

The success of these performers in discrediting and demystifying spiritism seems to have borne its fruits if one considers how the American mentalist Washington Irving Bishop (1885–89) was received in Constantinople the following year. Bishop had started his career as Anna Eva Fay’s — Miss Fey above — manager and revealed her tricks in 1876. He had then shifted to mind reading, which he explained not by spiritualism, but by his extraordinary muscular sensitivity, which allowed him to sense and read thoughts through the unconscious bodily cues of individuals he was in contact with.⁶⁸ The *Stamboul*’s reporting on Bishop’s performances was very different from its items on Thorn and Cazeneuve; far from showing any sympathy or admiration, the newspaper adopted a very doubtful attitude from the very start. The main reason was that contrary to his predecessors who amazed and amused the audience with their tricks, which they recognised as such, Bishop had a claim to authenticity as a ‘physiologist’ that went against the grain of the newspaper’s predominantly sceptical stance. This negative attitude was further accentuated by the fact that the daily’s director, the Irish Baron Henry Laffan Hanly, had attended the first performance and challenged the impartiality of one of the witnesses to the experiment, a man whose visiting card bore the strange mention of “Van der Merwe, Lat. 26° S. Long. 16° 10' W., Africa.”⁶⁹ Five days after the event, the *Stamboul* published a long letter by one G. Chassagnon, a “professor of abstract sciences” residing in Pera. This ‘expert’ gave a damning assessment of Bishop’s performance, comparing him to Cazeneuve, Thorn, and Homes, who on top of the merit of openly claiming their skills as illusionists, were much better than him at performing their tricks.⁷⁰ A few days later, the daily was happy to announce that Thorn was

66 *Stamboul* (5 August 1885), 1.

67 *Stamboul* (28 September 1885), 2.

68 S. During, *Modern Enchantments. The Cultural Power of Secular Magic* (Cambridge, MA and London 2002), 161–167.

69 *Stamboul* (19 March 1886), 1; (20 March 1886), 1–2; (22 March 1886), 1; (24 March 1886), 2. The coordinates indicated correspond to a point in the South Atlantic, halfway between São Paulo and Namibia!

70 “Lecture de pensées”, *Stamboul* (23 March 1886), 2. Three days later, the newspaper published a shorter letter by Chassagnon to Bishop, whereby he threatened to pursue him

about to return and to suggest that Bishop might want to avoid the embarrassment of a confrontation by leaving the city as soon as possible.⁷¹

One could expand upon these morsels of information to encompass the entirety of Abdülhamid's reign, after which spiritism seems to have benefited from the liberalisation of the system following the 1908 Young Turk Revolution and the consequent boom in publications, a phenomenon thoroughly studied by both Toumarkine and Türesay in their works. Nevertheless, rather than resume a somewhat tedious enumeration of performances and press items, I think it might be more useful to take a step back and try to draw some general conclusions from the available information and to focus ultimately on the least visible aspect of the question, the participation of Muslims in spiritist activities.

Following Bishop's alleged flop, Pera was witness to several more performances, all of which involved illusion and magic, and were generally labelled as 'anti-spiritist'. One D. Saint-Germain in 1888,⁷² a 'local' illusionist by the name of Melides, evidently Greek, dubbed the "Magician of Orient,"⁷³ the 'celebrity' Santi Soraci,⁷⁴ a returning Cazeneuve,⁷⁵ a certain Delaunay Petrowski and a 'Mademoiselle' Benita,⁷⁶ the 'Great' Baron Poletti,⁷⁷ the hypnotist Pickman,⁷⁸ Spiridion Karidis, of 'great fame in Europe'...⁷⁹ The references were clearly less

"from city to city, like his shadow, to publicly expose all his tricks" (*Stamboul* (26 March 1886), 2).

71 *Stamboul* (2 April 1886), 2.

72 *Stamboul* (31 July 1888), 2.

73 *Stamboul* (24 December 1890), 2.

74 *Stamboul* (6 April 1892), 3; (11 April 1892), 3; (13 April 1892), 3.

75 *Stamboul* (1 December 1892), 1; (7 January 1893), 2; (28 January 1893), 2; (1 March 1893), 1. This was probably the occasion for Abdülhamid to show once more his appreciation by bestowing upon "Mösyö Kaznöv" and "Madmazel Rendösölanc" (Reine (?) de Solange) the medal for arts and sciences (*sanayi madalyası*) (BOA, İ TAL 10/70, decree dated 14 Cemaziyülevvel 1310/22 Teşrinisani 1308 (4 December 1892)). Indeed, we learn from a much later item in the press that Cazeneuve was accompanied by his 'niece,' Mademoiselle de Solange (*Stamboul* (22 April 1902), 3).

76 *Stamboul* (8 June 1893), 2.

77 *Stamboul* (29 September 1893), 1.

78 *Stamboul* (2 May 1894), 1–2. Jean-Lambert Pickman (1857–1925) was a Belgian illusionist, who started his career under the stage name of Alberti, and, after 1893, reverted to his surname and acquired great fame as a mentalist and hypnotist. Pickman came back a few years later (see below, p. 102 and fn 87).

79 *Stamboul* (20 July 1900), 3; (24 July 1900), 3.

numerous, and seemed to disappear altogether by the turn of the century. A few items on spiritism, generally borrowed from the French press, maintained the sceptical, even sarcastic, tone observed in the preceding decade. The long description by ‘Passe-Partout,’ a regular but anonymous contributor of the *Stamboul*, of a séance held in Pera ended with the revelation that the whole event had been a hoax concocted by people who wanted to play an April’s fool trick on one of their friends.⁸⁰ By and large, contrary to some claims in the *Revue spirite*, one gets the impression that the spiritist scene in Istanbul — or rather in its Europeanised district of Pera — was mostly limited to popular performances of illusionism and mentalism, a clear sign of a predominantly sceptical attitude. This was apparently also the case with Abdülhamid, who seems to have particularly enjoyed the tricks performed by some of the celebrities of the world of illusionism.

The dearth of documentation in the Ottoman archives makes it difficult to guess what the official stance might have been in this respect, or even if there ever was any real concern regarding this issue. In June-July 1876, the Council of Education granted a certain Angelos Nicolaidis, residing in Galata, the permission to publish the Greek translation of a book in French called ‘Spiritism’ (*İspiritezim*), apparently translated as “*O Pnevmatismos*” (*Ο Πνευματισμός*).⁸¹ While this information, corroborated by Türesay’s finding that Nicolaidis had indeed translated three of Kardec’s books into Greek,⁸² suggests that the publisher saw some potential for spiritism among the Ottoman Greek public — and perhaps readers in Greece — it would certainly be pure speculation to link the fact that this permit was issued during the first month of Murad V’s reign to the influence of, say, Scalieri or other spiritists in Istanbul. We also owe to Türesay the information concerning at least three publications in Turkish more or less directly related to spiritism during the Hamidian period: Besim Ömer’s *Hypnotizm*, Camille Flammarion’s *Uranie*, and Alexandre Dumas fils’s *Césarine*.⁸³

80 *Stamboul* (1 April 1897), 3.

81 BOA, MF MKT 37/137 and 39/23, Publication permits dated 23 Cemaziyyülevvel 1293/3 June 1292 (15 June 1876) and 12 Cemaziyyülahir 1293/23 June 1292 (4 July 1876).

82 Türesay, “Between Science and Religion” 177.

83 B. Ömer, *İpnotizm yahut Tenvim ve Tenevvüm* (1307/1891), Flammarion, *Ürani yahut Heyet Perisi* (1308/1892) and Dumas, *Sezarın yahut İspiritezim ile Atisi Keşfedilen bir Kadının Sergüzeşti* (1309/1893) (Türesay, “Between Science and Religion”, 177–178).

While these are certainly indicative of the popularity of some aspects of the supernatural and paranormal in Hamidian Istanbul, their relevance should not be overrated either. After all, two of these titles belonged to popular fiction, and hypnosis, especially explained by a physician, does not need to be taken as an endorsement of spiritism. More importantly, these 'positive' reactions need to be taken into consideration against 'negative' ones, such as the predominance of anti-spiritism and illusionism as explained earlier, as well as a number of official unsympathetic measures and reports. Thus, in 1884, the proliferation of 'magicians' (*sihirbaz*) exploiting the ignorance of simple folk (*iğfal ve ibraz-ı sade-dilan*) was at one point seen as important enough to warrant a consultation with the Council of State.⁸⁴ In 1891, when the Ministry of the Interior informed the Grand Vizierate that one Dr Jelavejinsky (?) had applied to obtain the permission to organise a hypnotism performance at the Concordia theatre and to teach this science in a private home, it also noted that it thought such activities were not appropriate.⁸⁵ An undated and anonymous report on "public amusements of hypnotism" (*tenvim lu'biyat-ı aleniyesi*), perhaps penned for the occasion, gave an extremely negative assessment of the practice, allegedly drawing on the opinion of specialists such as the French neurologist Charcot, and with a particular stress on the fact that the hypnotised subject could be forced to obey all commands and to commit such deeds as "theft, evil, slaughter, and all sorts of crimes."⁸⁶ This could also be linked to the fact that in 1902, the police chief of Beyoğlu/Pera informed the palace that Pickman had been forbidden from performing his 'magnetism show' at the Petits-Champs theatre,⁸⁷ although this information needs to be taken with a grain of salt, since the *Stam-*

84 BOA, ŞD 2478/10 and 2480/29, Exchange between the Grand Vizierate and the Council of State, 7 Cemaziyyülevvel 1301/22 February 1299 (5 March 1884) and 12 Recep 1301/12 Mayıs 1300 (24 May 1884). The Council of State's view was that Article 233 of the Penal Code regarding embezzlement was sufficient to deal with the issue at hand.

85 BOA, DH MKT 1804/10, Ministry of the Interior to Grand Vizierate, 18 Cemaziyyülahir 1308/17 Kânunusani 1306 (29 January 1891).

86 BOA, Y PRK M 3/32, "Public amusements of hypnotism," n.d. Without suggesting that he may have been the author, or the inspiration, for this report, it is interesting to note that one of the *Stamboul's* collaborators, L. Prétextat, wrote against the practice of public performances of hypnotism, which he found to be degrading to the subjects picked by the performer (*Stamboul*, 24 July 1900, 3; 22 April 1902, 3).

87 BOA, Y PRK ZB 32/40, Beyoğlu *mutasarrıf* Hamdi Pasha to Yıldız, 5 April 1318 (17 April 1902).

boul announced, and commented on, the Belgian hypnotist's shows at around the exact same time.⁸⁸ Two years later, the Press Bureau – AKA as the censorship office – informed the Ministry of the Interior that the Izmir Greek daily *Amalthea* had published on 28 June 1904 an article on hypnotism (*inpotizmi!*) and that the governor of Aydın needed to be informed of the prohibition to publish anything in the press relating to hypnotism and magnetism;⁸⁹ a few days later, the ministry wrote accordingly to the governor, requesting that “the necessary measures be taken.”⁹⁰ Is it a coincidence that there seems to be a serious drop in the number of items published in the *Stamboul* relating to these practices in the following years, apparently until 1909? It would require a more thorough study of the press to be able to substantiate this impression any further.

The only additional issue that might be worth addressing, however imperfectly, is that of the participation of Muslims in the spiritist milieu of the Ottoman capital. Madame Leüie's claims concerning the interest shown by two unidentifiable pashas can hardly be taken to run counter to the observation, in 1869, that “almost the entirety of the followers was composed of French, Italians, and Greeks.” As noted earlier, I do not think either that the publication of a book on hypnotism by a medical doctor and of two translations of French novels involving spiritist themes can be taken as a clear indicator of outstanding spiritist interest and activity among Muslim Ottomans. As to the reports and communications sent to the *Revue spirite* and said to emanate from Muslim spiritists, the impartiality of the journal being rather questionable, they need to be handled with great caution. In 1901, a “letter from a Muslim spiritist group,” dated 28 September 1901, stated that they had discovered spiritism only ten months earlier, by accident, and had found themselves in a “moral crisis,” to which they found an answer in Kardec's works. They insisted that they were devout Muslims, strongly committed to their faith, but found no contradiction in spiritism. They were curious, however, to know whether Muslim spirits had ever been contacted during séances and suggested that a particular effort

88 *Stamboul*, 12 April 1902, 3; 18 April 1902, 3; 19 April 1902, 3; 22 April 1902, 3. A possible explanation can be found in the information, provided on 18 April, that the performance announced for that day (Friday) had been postponed to Monday (21 April).

89 BOA, DH MKT 873/25, Press Bureau to the Ministry of the Interior, 7 Cemaziyülevvel 1322/8 July 1320 (20 July 1904).

90 BOA, DH MKT 873/25, Ministry of the Interior to the governor of Aydın, 12 Cemaziyülevvel 1322/13 July 1320 (25 July 1904).

be made to call upon “the pure and sublime spirit of the greatest Arab philosopher of the Middle Ages,” Ibn Arabi (1165–1240). Reacting immediately to this suggestion, the journal issued a call to all its followers to inform them of any contact they may have had with the great thinker.⁹¹ Sure enough, in March of the following year, a spiritist group in Badajoz, Spain, was lucky enough to contact Ibn Arabi, who gave them “proof of identity,” which they were asked to transmit to their brethren of Istanbul.⁹²

Perhaps the most interesting episode of spiritism reported from Istanbul is the séance held on 11 Receb 1319 (24 October 1901) by the same group who had sent a letter to the journal in late September. This time, the tone was much more optimistic: “Spiritism is spreading with such great success in our country that part of the enlightened and well-educated spirits is busy with the study and criticism of the spiritist doctrine.” They had established contact with “the spirits of great Muslim philosophers, who had made the glory of Islam,” but also with Voltaire, Kardec, Schopenhauer, Socrates, and Plato. Their enthusiasm knew only one obstacle, that of reincarnation, of which they had received no confirmation in their “spiritist interviews,” and which they had chosen not to believe in for the time. The minutes of the séance were presented in the form of a dialogue between their medium — an 18-year-old auditor at the Council of State — and an unidentified spirit. Questions were asked about the cosmos and whether there were fixed stars — there were none — about the outcome of the Boer War — the British would have to evacuate Egypt in about ten years — and about the nature, gender, and religion of the creatures on the other side — they were not human, had no gender, had a religion, but no prophets as they did not need any. The spirit contacted was unable to see “our Great Prophet,” but when asked whether they saw “our sultan’s ethereal body,” they said that they did perfectly. When asked whether he resembled the “Pure Spirits”? the answer was surprising: “He is much more elevated than the Pure Spirits.” The following questions and answers were even more intriguing:

- When shall he die?
- His ethereal body wishes that he come promptly.
- Why?
- Because he is Sublime, Great, and Pure.

91 “Lettre d’un groupe spirite musulman,” *Revue spirite*, 44/12 (1 December 1901), 747–749.

92 “Une communication du groupe de Badajoz,” *Revue spirite*, 49/11 (1 November 1905), 689–692.

Apparently, such praise of the sultan came as an embarrassment to the journal's administrators, who, rather than censor the document, found the solution in inserting an editorial comment at the end of the report:

We regret that our friends should have chosen, among the spiritist communications they received, a purely somnambulist one. Indeed, the dialogue very clearly shows that only the medium's spirit intervened in the answers, and one could even conclude that he was under a strong influence of autosuggestion when he describes as a sublime spirit the author of atrocities committed in Armenia, which have taken the lives of 300,000 innocent human creatures, under the circumstances which all of Europe has discovered with horror.⁹³

Back to 'good old' magic

During this broad "*tour d'horizon*," we have moved from Scalieri's accusations of black magic against Sultan Abdülhamid to the discovery of his own resorting to spiritist healing in the hope of finding a cure to Sultan Murad's illness, and from there to an investigation of the spiritist scene in Istanbul during these events and, more broadly, during the Hamidian period. It is only natural that we should now return one final time to traditional magic in the same context. However, this time, contrary to Scalieri's unsubstantiated claims about voodoo and black magic used against Murad by his 'evil' brother, I will refer to a solidly documented episode of an attempt at using magical intervention in the hope of securing the ailing ex-sultan's recovery.

The source for this information is a file in the Ottoman archives containing documents attesting to the contacts and correspondence between Murad's mother, Şevkefza, and Hafız Mehmed Emin Efendi, the steward of the corporation of porters (*hamallar kethüdası*), regarding measures to be taken to ensure Murad's recovery.⁹⁴ The 'treatment' involved 'blessings' (*okutma*) by the sheikhs,

93 "Le spiritisme à Constantinople", *Revue spirite*, 45/10 (1 October 1902), 637–640.

94 BOA, Y EE 22/82. The file consists of nine letters addressed by Şevkefza to Hafız Mehmed Emin Efendi, three of them dated from December 1876 to August 1877, and the remaining six bearing no date, and of two declarations by the said Mehmed Emin concerning his involvement in the matter, one of which is dated 25 Rebiyülahir 1296 (18 April 1879). The letters were published in İ. H. Uzunçarşılı, "Beşinci Sultan Murad'ın Tedâvîsine ve Ölümüne Ait Rapor ve Mektuplar," *Belleten*, 10/38 (1946), 335–343. It is not clear whether Mehmed Emin was himself engaging in magic, or if he was just a messenger between the palace and Melami dervishes by the names of Hasan Baba, İbrahim Çavuş, and Salih Efendi. Based on

fumigating Murad's underwear, and the preparation of amulets (*nüşha*, vulg. *muska*), all of which seem to be rather common practices often described in the ethnographic sources concerning magic in late Ottoman times.⁹⁵ Rather than list these, I will limit myself to quoting from some of the letters, which, apart from giving a general sense of the context, present the advantage of providing us with surprisingly detailed and accurate descriptions of Murad's ailment.

The dated letters provide us with rare insight into Murad's evolving condition and the efforts made by his mother. By mid-December 1876, she was still assuring her correspondent of the importance she attached to her son's recovery, with little indication of any progress.⁹⁶ About a month later, she was happy to report that he had sent back greetings to the sheikh but had not much more to say.⁹⁷ Four days later, however, she was evidently demoralised, confessing that despair had incited her to seek help from so many people, and to no avail; from then on, she would trust no one else than him.⁹⁸ By mid-March 1877, nine months into the ex-sultan's mental collapse, she had begun to nourish hopes of seeing Murad step out of the state of prostration that had overcome him, and described what seems to have been a 'cathartic' moment of his recovery:

My dear Hafız Efendi

I have received your glad tidings with great pleasure. May God grant us our wish without delay. Amen. How wonderful of God, his recovery is increasing day by day. You know well our situation. You said that if he cried, that would be a good sign. For the past week, he has been thinking to himself and crying about his circumstances. Had you seen him, it would have broken your heart. Tears were falling from his eyes like chickpeas. At the same time, he prays and implores the Lord Creator of all things. May God accept his prayers and forgive his faults. It kills me to see him this way, but after he has cried, he is relieved, his understanding and comprehension increase, he reads and even studies books. He also writes properly,

Mehmed Efendi's two declarations, evidently prepared for Abdülhamid's benefit, Uzunçarşılı assumes that he was a spy, a sort of double agent, pretending to help Murad but in fact reporting back to Abdülhamid. A more likely interpretation, corroborated by the date of his declaration (1879) is that he was forced to confess his deeds, in the hope that they would constitute incriminating evidence against Murad and, especially, his mother.

95 See n. 1 above.

96 BOA, Y EE 22/82, Şevkefza to Hafız Mehmed Emin, 2 Kânunusani 1292/14 December 1876.

97 BOA, Y EE 22/82, Şevkefza to Hafız Mehmed Emin, 11 Muharrem 1294/26 January 1877.

98 BOA, Y EE 22/82, Şevkefza to Hafız Mehmed Emin, 15 Muharrem 1294/30 January 1877.

thank God, so his health improves every hour and every day, but he still is very sorry about his state. Whenever his mind clears, he asks in tears “What have I done to anyone to be kept in this way?” and feels great sadness.⁹⁹

By mid-August, Şevkefza had even better news: “I can announce you that, praise be to God, my noble son is on the path of recovering his health.”¹⁰⁰ Was this the result of an objective observation, or just wishful thinking? We will have to leave that question open and focus on the concrete evidence that this quest for magical intervention revealed about Murad’s condition. The four letters already mentioned had little to offer besides the ‘cathartic’ experience of March, which seemed to indicate that Murad had somewhat loosened up enough to express his regrets and frustrations. While the remaining letters reveal much more details, the fact that they are all undated makes it difficult to integrate them in a reasonable timeline that might extend from the end of 1876 to mid- or late 1877.

Nevertheless, thanks to Şevkefza’s very explicit description of the situation, we are allowed a fascinating peak into some of the symptoms of Murad’s illness. One of these documents is particularly enlightening: [Ill. 12]

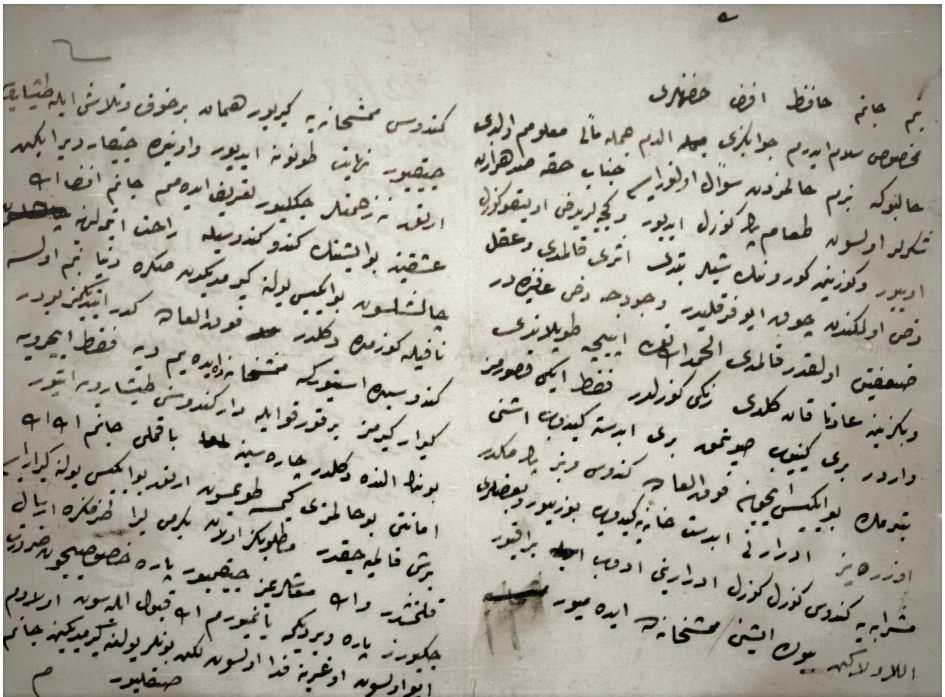
My very dear Lord Hafız Efendi

My most sincere greetings. I have received your answer and fully understood its meaning. If, on the other hand, you ask about us, Hundreds of thousands of thanks to the Lord, he eats very well and at night he sleeps well, and the visions he had are

99 “Canım Hafız Efendi,

Tebşirlerini aldım fevkalade memnun oldum. Cenab-ı Allah sayınızı zayi etmesin. An karibü’z-zaman maksudumuza nail buyursun. Amin. Maşallah kendisinin günden güne kesb-i afiyeti mütezaayid olmaktadır. Malumunuzdur halimizi pek rana biliyorsunuz. Ağlar ise müjde demişsiniz. Bir haftadır kendi kendisine düşünüp haline ağlıyor. Görmüş olsanız yürekler dayanmaz. Gözünden leblebi gibi yaşlar iniyor. Ve onunla beraber Vacibü’l-vücut hazretlerine tazarru ve niyaz etmektedir. Hemen Allah kabulüyle kusurunu af buyursun amin. Ben onu öyle gördükçe belak oluyorum fakat ağladıktan sonra açılıyor, fehmi idraki ziyade oluyor, okuyor ve kitap da mütalaa ediyor. Ve yazı dahi güzel yazıyor elhamdülillah, yani her gün ve her saat iyilik artmaktadır lakin haline pek müteessiftir. Anladıkça ben kime ne yaptım ki ben böyle muhasara etmişler diye ağlayıp meysul oluyor. Ve cümle yazılan haberlerinden fevkalade memnun oldum. Baba hazretlerinin mübarek ellerinden öperim. Tebşirlerden teşekkür edip sevindim. Baki halimiz budur. Efendim Allah yüz aklığın versin cümlemize” (BOA, Y EE 22/82, from Şevkefza to Hafız Mehmed Emin, 25 Safer 1294/11 March 1877).

100 BOA, Y EE 22/82, Şevkefza to Hafız Mehmed Emin, 5 Şaban 1294/15 August 1877.



12. Letter from Şevkefza Kadinefendi to Hacı Mehmed Emin Efendi, n.d. BOA, Y EE 22/82.

over, no trace remains of them, and his mind is better than before and quite different, and his body is better, too, most of the weakness is now gone, praised be the Lord Almighty, he has recovered well and blood has returned to his complexion, his colour is fine. But we still have two difficulties, one is to get dressed and undressed, and the other is to go the toilet and do his thing. Both him and us are very sad about this. He does go to the toilet to urinate, and he sometimes urinates properly by himself into a pot and leaves it there. But he can never do his bigger business in the loo. He enters the toilet by himself, and then comes out in fear and in a flurry. Eventually he goes in his underwear, and I cannot tell you the difficulties we have to take it off him. My dear Master, for the love of God, if something could be done to help him in this respect; as long as these two matters are not solved, I will not care for anything in the world. This is what causes us extraordinary grief. He, too, wants to go to the loo, but as soon as he gets in, he can barely throw himself out in fear. He cannot help it someone has to find a way. Oh my God, let no one hear about this, if these matters can be solved, there will be no concern left. The twenty liras you have asked for have been sent to you. I swear, our salaries are not being paid, we are in much trouble regarding money. I have no objection to paying, may God accept it.

As long as my child is well, I will sacrifice anything, but I am frustrated that these matters have not been solved.¹⁰¹

Hallucinations, a general weakness, a refusal, or incapacity to dress and undress, a loss of personal hygiene, and an irrational fear of the toilet and a consequent incapacity to defecate on his own... A post scriptum to this letter noted that ‘the visions have ended, he sees nothing and does not mumble to himself, he speaks rather normally. If we do not count these two problems [dressing/undressing and toilet hygiene], there is nothing [wrong].’¹⁰² These bits and pieces of information give us a sense of the gravity of the ex-sultan’s condition, not to mention the unashamed milking of his mother’s credulity by unscrupulous individuals. Yet, Şevkefza was still hopeful, as she observed — or convinced herself of — her son’s improving health.

101 “Benim canım Hafız Efendi hazretleri,

Mahsus selam ederim. Cevabınızı aldım cümle meali malumum oldu. Halbuki bizin halimizden sual olunursa Cenab-ı Hakk’a sad bezaran şükürler olsun, taam pek güzel ediyor ve geceleri dahi uyku güzel uyuyor ve gözüne görünen şeyler bitti, eseri kalmadı ve aklı dahi evvelkinden çok iyi, farklıdır ve vücutça dahi afiyettedir, zafiyeti o kadar kalmadı, elhamdülillahu teala iyice toplandı ve benzine adeta kan geldi, rengi güzeldir. Fakat iki kusurumuz vardır, biri giyinip soyunmak, biri abdeste gidip işini bitirmek. Bu ikisi için fevkalade kendisi ve biz pek mükedder üzereyiz. İdrarını abdesthaneye gidip bozuyor ve bazıları masrapaya kendisi güzel güzel idrarını edip bırakıyor. İlla ve lakin büyük işini memişhanede edemiyor. Kendisi memişhaneye giriyor, hemen bir havf ve telaş ile dışarıya çıkıyor. Nihayet donuna ediyor ve onu da çıkartır iken artık ne zahmetler çekiliyor tarif edemem. Canım Efendim Allah aşkına bu işinde kendi kendisiyle rahat etmelerine çalışılsın bu ikisi yoluna girmedikten sonra dünya benim olsa nafile gözümde değildir. Fevkalade keder ettiğimiz budur. Kendisi de istiyor memişhanede edeyim diye fakat içeriye girer girmez bir korku ile dar kendisini dışarıya atıyor. Bunun elinde değildir çaresine bakmalı Allah Allah, aman bu halimizi kimse duymasın, artık bu ikisi yoluna girer ise bir şey kalmayacaktır. Matlubunuz olan yirmi lira tarafınıza irsal kılınmıştır. Vallahi maaşlarımız çıkmıyor, para hususu için zaruret çekiyoruz. Para verdiğime yanmıyorum, Allah kabul eylesin. Evladım iyi olsun uğruna feda olsun, lakin bunlar yoluna girmedikçe canım sıkılıyor” (BOA, Y EE 22/82, Şevkefza to Hafız Mehmed Emin, n.d.).

102 “Hamdolsun gözüne görünen bitti, hiçbir şey görmüyor ve hem kendi kendine söylenmiyor, adeta güzel konuşuyor. Bu iki kusur olmaz ise bir şey yoktur. Görseniz kendisi pek ala fakat bu kusur vardır” (BOA, Y EE 22/82, Şevkefza to Hafız Mehmed Emin, n.d.).

Concluding remarks

Our objective in the preceding section was not to revisit the entire episode of Murad's mental breakdown, but simply to point to the fact that magic, as understood and commissioned by his mother, can be used as a very concrete evidence concerning the ex-sultan's health, which is simply not available in other sources, including official medical reports. Interestingly, the 'other' magic we saw at work, that of spiritism as practiced by Duneau, fulfils a somewhat similar role by revealing some of the symptoms observed by the healer, albeit with much less detail, due to the very indirect and consequently imprecise way in which this information was conveyed from the actual event down to its account by Leymarie some twenty years later. That magic, in both its versions, traditional and modern, should become a source of medical information is an ironic twist that deserves some attention.

Of course, what I believe to be one of the most interesting aspects of the case under study is precisely the rare and unexpected convergence of these two types of magic, whichever way we might want to define them: Eastern and Western, Oriental and Western, traditional and modern... Of course, the implicit opposition embedded in each of these pairs of terms is particularly striking; as a result, one is tempted to consider this binary aspect as being one of the most important revelations of this study.

While there is no denying that this is indeed a fascinating discovery, I believe it may also be useful to be able to set aside or transcend this dichotomy, which inevitably tends to play into some of the dominant tropes of Orientalism. True, despite all its esoterism, spiritism always came with a scientific claim that was further enhanced by the prestige of some of its intellectual sponsors, such as Victor Hugo or Camille Flammarion.¹⁰³ It would be extremely difficult, if not impossible, to find any similar or even faintly comparable claim regarding 'good old' magic, be it in its Oriental or Western form, since its references were always lodged in religion and all its mystical derivatives. That being said, the fact that its followers had scientific claims does not make spiritism more scientific than traditional forms of magic. In fact, there is no *essential* difference between Duneau's alleged "fluidic contacts" and the "breath" (*nefes, üfürük*) of the der-

¹⁰³ This is particularly true of spiritism as opposed to spiritualism, the former having a scientific claim, while the latter consists of dualist metaphysical belief (Türesay, "Between Science and Religion", 168).

vishes who were claiming to use their healing powers to cure Murad. Scalieri may have been a convinced spiritist, but the confession of another of his accomplices, Aziz Bey's son Kadri Bey, reveals that Scalieri and his father went to the grave of one Elekli/Elekçi Baba/Dede, where he "turned a sieve" (*elek çevirmek*) to figure out if they would succeed in their undertaking.¹⁰⁴

At the very beginning of this essay, I had expressed my hope that one of the advantages to be derived from this study might be the possibility of going against the grain with respect to some of the clichés that tend to stick to the question of magical practices in an Ottoman context. Orientalist tropes are probably the most blatant among these, and I believe that the way the major actors surrounding Murad navigated through spiritism and magic in their efforts to cure him of his alleged madness come to show that the borders between East and West were blurred, to say the least. A Greek Freemason, an Ottoman Muslim political activist, members of the Parisian spiritist community, an ageing queen mother, a French medium and healer, a group of Muslim clerics, were all participating in practices, which, behind a veil of cultural and ideological differences, converged towards a very similar perception of occult powers and influences. Another stigma that usually clings to such phenomena, namely that of the dominant presence and agency of women, both as users and providers of these services and practices, is also seriously challenged by the predominantly male participation and agency observed throughout this particular case. Finally, the racially or ethnically tainted stereotype of black or Romani practitioners of these 'dark' or occult arts does not hold water in the face of the preponderantly white and affluent profile of most of the people involved in the unfolding of this story.

Of course, it would be misleading, not to say naïve, to claim that the case under study is representative of all such practices in late Ottoman times. Nev-

¹⁰⁴ "Gündüzden pederim ile Kırlandi Silivrikapı'da Elekli Baba'nın türbesine işleri olacak mı diye oraya giderek elek çevirmişler, olacağı haberini alıp gelmişler" (BOA, Y EE 23/5, Interrogation minutes of the Scalieri-Aziz Bey committee members, Kadri Bey's declaration, 10 Recep 1295/10 July 1878). Elekli or Elekçi Dede's grave is located near the land walls of Constantinople, close to Silivrikapı. According to one tradition, he was a standard bearer of Mehmed II during the conquest of Constantinople; more likely, he seems to have been a madman (*meczip*) who lived there in the seventeenth century and was venerated as a saintly character. See İstanbul Ansiklopedisi, s.v. "Elekci Dede" (Reşad Ekrem Koçu). According to another tradition, Elekçi Dede was Sultan Mehmed II's standard bearer during the conquest of Constantinople (<https://kulturvadisi.com/lokasyon/elekci-baba-turbesi>).

ertheless, it is my hope that the detailed and multi-layered nature of this particular episode will have provided us with an element that is generally lacking from our knowledge on the matter: an intimate and detailed insight into the dynamics of magical practices that may constitute a useful complement, if not an alternative, to the general and often generic information derived from ethnographic and literary sources.

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