A. EDITORIAL

Studying Ottoman views of the supernatural: the state-of-the-art and a research agenda

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This is the first issue of "*Aca'ib*: Occasional Papers on the Ottoman Perceptions of the Supernatural", so a couple of words on its context and scope may be not entirely out of place. This journal forms part of a five-year research project, GHOST, that is to say "Geographies and Histories of the Ottoman Supernatural Tradition: Exploring Magic, the Marvelous, and the Strange in Ottoman Mentalities", funded by the European Research Council under the program Consolidator Grant 2017. The research team consists of Marinos Sariyannis (Institute for Mediterranean Studies/FORTH, Rethymno, Greece), as Principal Investigator, Zeynep Aydoğan (Institute for Mediterranean Studies/FORTH, Rethymno, Greece), Feray Coşkun (Özyegin University, Istanbul, Turkey), Güneş Işıksel (Medeniyet University, Istanbul, Turkey), Bekir Harun Küçük (University of Pennsylvania, USA), Ethan Menchinger (Manchester University, UK), Aslı Niyazioğlu (Oxford University, UK), and

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Ahmet Tunç Şen (Columbia University, USA). We should also mention two Ph.D. candidates (Dimitris Giagtzoglou, Markos Litinas), some MA students and our technical staff who help keep things running. The project began in 2018; the present scientific publication aims at keeping the community informed of our activities, presenting some sources and literature surveys, but also serving as a forum for the many colleagues interested in such topics. Thus, over the next few pages we will try to describe what the subject and goals of our project are.

Notions and belief systems concerning nature and the supernatural constitute a little-explored aspect of Ottoman culture. As far as it concerns other Islamicate cultures and especially in medieval times, the last decades have witnessed several scholarly studies on issues such as magic, occult sciences or marvelous geography. Books and articles on various aspects of these issues had appeared long ago (one may just mention the names of Armand Abel, Georges-Henri Bousquet, Paul Kraus or Julius Ruska, or Toufic Fahd, Henry Corbin or Pierre Lory from a younger generation); but it was during the very last decade that a real eruption of studies in the Islamic occult was witnessed, from a bunch of authors still producing exquisite works: Emilie Savage-Smith on various forms of divination, Jean-Charles Coulon and Noah Gardiner on al-Buni's magical universe, Matthew Melvin-Koushki on lettrism and the expansion of occultism in late medieval Central Asia, Liana Saif on the Ikhwan-i Safa and medieval Islamic esotericism.

This kind of research is thriving, as attested by a number of colloquia and workshops established during the last five years. However, little work has been conducted in Ottoman studies, although they indeed show the greatest potential in terms of surviving narrative, archival, and visual documents. Apart from a few pioneering studies, we still know very little on the concepts and practices connected with magic or the supernatural in an Ottoman context. One should note especially Cornell Fleischer's pioneering articles on prophetic beliefs and prognostications in sixteenth-century Ottoman politics; Aslı Niyazioğlu's work on aspects of the Ottoman sheikhs' relationship with the notion of Hereafter, especially through dreams; Özgen Felek's work on Ottoman interpretation of dreams; as well as three or four recent Ph.D. theses on various branches of Ottoman occult sciences (alchemy – Tuna Artun, astrology – Ahmet Tunç Şen, physiognomy – Emin Lelić). Thus, there is a significant corpus of studies which is bound to increase in the coming years.

But what exactly is our subject here? We now refer to as supernatural these phenomena that escape (or, rather, that a given culture takes as escaping) the natural laws, being difficult or even impossible to be explained in rational terms. Still, the very notion of nature is not neutral and ahistorical: for the mental category of "supernatural" to have any meaning, one needs to have an understanding of "nature" as a field of explicable phenomena, which are repeated in an ordinary fashion and can be understood by observation and theoretical thinking. In their modern sense, the notions of both nature and the supernatural were developed by medieval Christian theologians and philosophers such as Peter Lombard (Petrus Lombardus) and Thomas Aquinas in the twelfth and thirteenth century, in the course of debates on the canonization process and the question of how could one distinguish real miracles from extraordinary yet natural phenomena.[1] These thinkers connected the "supernatural" with God: God has the power to produce miracles, i.e. events that exceed all nature, that is all orderly repetition of things through intelligible reasons. This "order of natural causes", as termed by scholastic philosophy, is what we conceive as natural and ordinary, even if we don't really understand it. Aside from nature and the supernatural, thus, another notion found its place: the "preternatural", exceptional and strange phenomena that are not miracles, just the product of causes natural but concealed for the human intellect. These are the marvels, the medieval *mirabilia*, the wonders that produce awe but are not necessarily miraculous; a more modern rendition would be "the paranormal activity".

Classical Ottoman language has no word for the "supernatural" (now *doğaüstü*, a word-for-word rendition of the European term). Nevertheless, Islamic thought had produced a very similar set of notions, and almost two centuries earlier than Thomas Aquinas to boot. It was the famous early twelfth-century philosopher al-Ghazali who had already spoken of the ordinary or "custom" (*ʿada*, Turkish *adet*), meaning the chain of causes and results to which the human intellect is accustomed. In addition, anything extraordinary is *khâriq ul-ʿâda*, "what tears the custom" (of God), a term that passed onto modern Turkish as *harikulâde* with the meaning "extraordinary, wonderful". To further follow al-Ghazali's theology, there is the "divine custom" (*ʿada ilahiyya*) which is the usual but not necessary causality created by the consistency of God's acts. What is really torn is not God's but the creatures' custom or order of

1 See R. Bartlett, *The Natural and the Supernatural in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge 2008).

things. This term is mostly used to interpret and denote miracles: God grants to Prophets or saints such cases that contradict the usual course of things, in the case of the Prophets in order to demonstrate their sincerity and truth of mission (these miracles are the *mudjiza*), in the case of saints as a personal distinction or favour (*karâma*).

Yet, the same problem Christian theologians confronted concerning canonization was also present in Islamic thought: "breaking the custom". Although this could not of course occur without God's permission, it could also be at least very similar to human actions that were not divine miracles. In other words, as al-Ghazali himself was forced to admit, a false prophet might perform deeds identical with miracles. How was theology to deal with this fact? Al-Ghazali maintained that even prophetical miracles were simply marvels, i.e. "seemingly wondrous events that, if all factors are taken into consideration, can be explained as effects of natural causes[, only] witnessed rarely"[2]—in other words, he placed the miracles of the prophets in the "preternatural" category rather than the "supernatural". The great fourteenth-century historian, Ibn Khaldūn (who is highly critical of any use of magic), provides less space to this possibility, stressing the fraudulent or demoniac character of "miraculous" deeds: while speaking of *sīmiyā'* or the science of the secret power of letters, he notes that although this science could be considered a licit study for the pious, there were some Sufis that professed the ability to control the material world through it. These Sufis claimed the power to invade this world's order (*khawāriq al-'āda*). Ibn Khaldūn argues that, although such control of the material world is indeed possible, this can only be conducted through divine grace in the saints' miracles. Without divine grace, whoever tries to exert the same control is comparable to talismanic magicians, and equally contemptible. Furthermore, according to Ibn Khaldūn such results (the saints' miracles apart) may in fact be procured only by the power of will and spirit of certain persons, rather than by their knowledge of any science. Following a long tradition of disbelief or rather skepticism against an all-too-easy canonization of Sufi sheikhs, the Ottoman prince Korkud (d. 1513) also writes that whoever commits acts that "tear the custom" is not necessarily performing miracles: if he does not adhere to the Sharia, these acts may simply be the result of

2 F. Griffel, *Al- Ghazālī's Philosophical Theology* (Oxford 2009), 157, 195–196.

magic or tricks.[3] The debate on the reality of present-day miracles, following a tradition already from the ninth and tenth centuries, continued up to the late eighteenth, as those opposing the influence of Sufi sheikhs emphasized that their purported miracles might well be acts of magic or satanic deception. Sufi literature itself was somehow influenced by this opposition: whereas early stories of fourteenth or fifteenth-century saints abound in miraculous resurrections, for instance, an early eighteenth-century collection of lives of Sufi sheikhs in Istanbul, albeit full of miracles (including apparitions of dead sheikhs), contains only one story of resurrection: not of a human, but of a weasel (an animal nevertheless often connected with the human soul, as in a story related by Evliya Çelebi about Sultan Bayezid's soul jumping out of his mouth to break the Ramadan fast).[4]

To sum up, just as in Christian scholasticism, there is a field of phenomena considered miraculous, and these are the acts of God breaking the custom of things—the *khariq al-ʿada*—and there is also another array of extraordinary events whose causes cannot be understood, at least not by the intellect of a common person. In the Islamicate vocabulary, this field (what Aquinas would call preternatural) is referred to as the *ghayb*, i.e. the "hidden" or "concealed". Magic, astrology and other forms of occult divination draw from this space of causes and hierarchies, which does not exclude supernatural beings as actors—angels, jinn and demons, as well as the famous "properties" of things, the incomprehensible (in their cause) homologies of the astral, the mineral, the vegetal and the human world, established through correspondences of numbers and letters. As established by the recent studies of Matthew Melvin-Koushki and Liana Saif (corroborating somehow the remarks by earlier scholarship of a "retreat in scientific thought"), the significance of the *ghayb* rose considerably from the thirteenth century onwards: not only more and more natural procedures (for instance, medical conditions and cures) were explained by recourse to this hidden world, but also the *ghayb* itself began to contain spiritual powers (the *ruhaniyyat*), now interpreted as supernatural

3 N. al-Tikriti, "Şehzade Korkud (ca. 1468–1513) and the articulation of early 16th century Ottoman religious identity", unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 2004, 230–231.

4 O. Ş. Gökyay (ed.), *Evliya Çelebi Seyahatnamesi*, Vol. 1 (Istanbul 1996), 140; S. A. Kahraman and Y. Dağlı (eds), *Evliya Çelebi Seyahatnamesi*, Vol. 3 (Istanbul 1999), 206.

entities, rather than properties based on a rational connection with astrology.[5] Thus the *ghayb* became a contested domain, a field for the legitimate control of which occultists, sorcerers, lettrist scholars, on the one hand, Sufi sheikhs and orthodox scholars, on the other, struggled.

Now, what are the kinds of sources which can help us explore this promising topic? A major source for the understanding of what was conceived as "marvelous" is the so-called *aja'ib* literature, i.e. cosmographies depicting (among others) the strange and extraordinary items of nature and civilization. *Aja'ib* ("marvel"), in general, refers to the marvels of antiquity and any kind of extraordinary, but not to the rationally inexplicable, natural phenomenon or man-made monument. Author of a very well-known cosmography of the late thirteenth century, Zakariyya al-Qazwini carefully defines his subject material: there are "marvels" or *'ajâ'ib*, that is those phenomena that "lead men to perplexity and bafflement, because their causes are difficult to be recognized and understood... with the mind that is implanted to them by nature"; and there are also "wonders" (*gharâ'ib*), which are extraordinary phenomena that conflict with man's familiar experience, since they are incited either by "strong souls" and spirits or by (at any rate) God's omnipotence. In the first category, Qazwīnī cites natural wonders such as the production of honey by bees or impressive meteorological phenomena; the second includes the miracles of Prophets and saints, as well as: divinations of soothsayers, the evil eye, the prognostic powers of certain people, extraordinary celestial or meteorological phenomena such as comets or the falling of snow during the summer, and the appearance of strange creatures. Qazwīnī notes that according to philosophers, these strange phenomena fall into three separate categories: those emanating from the soul without the mediation of physical force, either by the force of the faith (concerning Prophets and saints) or by magic (concerning evil spirits); those emanating of both heavenly forces and earthly elements with the use of magic incantations; and those emanating by physical forces, such as the properties of the magnet. Thus, one may speak of "ordinary marvels" (*'ajâ'ib*) and "extraordinary" ones (*gharâ'ib*), the latter being for the most unrepeatable

5 M. Melvin-Koushki, "Powers of One: The Mathematicalization of the Occult Sciences in the High Persianate Tradition", *Intellectual History of the Islamicate World*, 5 (2017), 127–199; L. Saif, "Between Medicine and Magic: Spiritual Aetiology and Therapeutics in Medieval Islam", in S. Bhayro and C. Rider (eds), *Demons and Illness from Antiquity to the Early-Modern Period* (Leiden 2017), 313–338.

and singular ones. However, this subtle conceptual differentiation does not seem in my view to have persisted among Qazwini's successors. A cursory reading of similar cosmographies of the fourteenth century demonstrates that "ordinary" and "extraordinary" marvels, *aja'ib* and *gara'ib*, were put together somehow haphazardly.

As for Ottoman literature, it did not produce many "marvelous geographies" of its own, although translations of Qazwini's and other similar works circulated widely, more often than not with significant additions and alterations. There were, however, some famous original specimens: a few early works show signs of originality, but their relation to the known tradition has yet to be explored, and a conceptual history of these terms through them is fairly promising. One might remark that the few original specimens of *aja'ib* entries in Ottoman cosmographical description differ markedly from the earlier literature in that they are no more situated in far and unreachable places. Instead, we read of *ajaib* phenomena in the very heart of the imperial territories, described as events recorded by eye-witnesses "here and now", one might say. Thus, Mahmud al-Hatib, a preacher who adapted a medieval cosmography into Ottoman Turkish in ca. 1562/3, added descriptions of a monster in Herzegovina, a miraculous source in Bosnia or the apparition of two dragons in the sky of Drama (also noting the date in the latter case).[6] A few decades later, in 1590, the poet Cinani included a series of *mirabilia* in a highly interesting collection of stories: supported by chains of transmission through reliable witnesses, these strange phenomena are situated in Gallipoli, Bulgaria, Western Anatolia or Egypt.[7] The same remark can be said concerning the travelogue by Evliya Çelebi, almost one century later: Evliya nonchalantly records every type of wonder that he witnessed during his travels, although we can never be sure whether he intends for the audience to believe him or to simply be entertained.

Aside from geographical works, other sources include extensive and remarkably rich material for the study of the "marvelous" and the "supernatural". To works of (mainly) fiction such as Cinani's collection or Evliya Çelebi's *Seyahatname*, one could add some sections of *falname*s (albums of large-scale

6 F. Coşkun, "An Ottoman Preacher's Perception of a Medieval Cosmography: Mahmûd al-Hatîb's Translation of *Kharîdat al-'Ajâ'ib wa Farîdat al-Gharâ'ib*", *Al-Masāq*, 23:1 (2011), 53–66 at 64-65; cf. also her research report in this issue.

7 O. Ünlü (ed.), *Cinânî: Bedâyiü'l-âsâr*, 2 vols (Harvard 2009), 329–337.

images made for prognostication through bibliomancy), which often contain sections on "wonders", together with chapters on demons, talismans and spells, and so forth, and even collections of administrative documents and especially *fetva*s (religious jurisprudence) mentioning ghost apparitions, magical practices and "abominable" traditions. Moreover, these sources present us with another feature of the "supernatural", namely ghost stories and other traditions concerning violations of the natural course of life and death. Among them, the few instances of vampire traditions recorded in Ottoman sources are clearly related to the Balkan folklore and have gained a certain visibility in modern research, albeit limited. These sources consist mainly of a series of fetvas, issued by the chief mufti Ebussuud in the mid-sixteenth century, which answer to some cases of corpses "becoming alive in the grave". Ebussuud answers that

> If this is true, it is caused by God's sacred will. There is a saying that "the wicked souls attach themselves to the corpses of those who while living were connected to them in their morals and practice, using [these corpses] as instruments for evil actions". This is not improbable for the divine power.

In another *fetva*, referring specifically to a Christian vampire near Salonica, the mufti suggests that its head should be cut off and thrown near its feet; or else, the corpse must be exhumed and cremated. It is interesting to note that these fetvas must have been quite famous, since their content is reproduced in a similar case in Thrace in 1701, whereas also Cinani uses it in narrating a ghost story.[8]

Ghost stories, on the other hand, are a rather neglected and even unstudied genre of Ottoman literature. For one thing, dead saints' apparitions were quite often described, as previously mentioned, but usually in quasi-unreal visions or in dreams. For the latter, there was an elaborate theology describing the various spiritual worlds (corporeal or *alem-i mulk*), spiritual (*alem-i ceberut*), the world of images (*alem-i misal*) where one travels while sleeping, and the incorporeal

8 On these cases see M. Sariyannis, "Of Ottoman Ghosts, Vampires and Sorcerers: An Old Discussion Disinterred", *ArchOtt*, 30 (2013), 191–216 at 194–203; S. F. Kirgi, *Osmanlı vampirleri: söylenceler, etkiler, tepkiler* (Istanbul 2018).

world (*alem-i melekut*) where one goes after death.[9] This theology, which is evident in several variations in Ottoman Sufi literature, helped to explain apparitions of dead saints in one's dreams in a way that did not offend the principles of faith. But there were some traditions about the souls of deceased persons coming to life, which were believed and thus required explanation. Let us turn once again to Cinani: among the series of *mirabilia* he records, there is a last part consisting of a handful of ghost stories, again recorded with their chain of transmission and carefully dated and located in areas such as the Peloponnese or Albania. For instance, in one story souls of the dead enter the bodies of people about to die and are able to speak with the sick person's voice; in another, a maid is raped by her deceased master; a scholar ambushes and attacks the ghost, but the maid consequently dies ten days later. Some of these stories are explained through jinn, others through Ebussuud fetvas on "wicked souls"; apart from the dogmatic issues revolving around the soul after death, an approach toward interpreting this material should also analyze the respective narrative techniques, in order to seek the ways in their authors reflected the entertainment value of these texts as opposed to their "factual" components. If geographical and other "marvels" consist of the "preternatural", then this field delves more strictly into the "supernatural" and touches directly upon the degree of direct divine intervention.

We should note here that, although some of the cases studied above reveal a more ambiguous attitude toward death, the usual reaction of the Ottomans to such apparitions was to attribute them to the jinn. It is important to bear in mind that the belief in the existence of jinn or spirits, being an essential part of Quranic cosmology, was universally accepted not only in folklore tales and traditions, but also in the more educated and even skepticist circles of Istanbul. Whereas traditional Muslim angelology gave specific tasks to the angels, such as praising God, communicating God's message to prophets, recording human deeds or guiding human souls after death, it seems that, through the reception of al-Suhrawardi's (d. 1191) illuminationist philosophy, angels were more and more present in the Ottoman perception of the world. In Marlene Kurz's words, in this process the cosmos was populated with a host of holy and perfect

9 On the history of the "world of images", a theory al-Shahrazuri elaborated after an idea of al-Suhrawardi, see L. W. Cornelis van Lit, *The World of Image in Islamic Philosophy: Ibn Sīnā, Suhrawardī, Shahrazūrī, and Beyond* (Edinburgh 2017).

entities who "competed with the prophets with regard to their supreme role as intermediaries between God and man".[10] Recourse to these beliefs could, and was indeed used to, explain every phenomenon or tradition that would nowadays be deemed "irrational" or "supernatural".

A third pillar for understanding the Ottoman conceptions of "supernatural", together with geographic *mirabilia* and stories about death and revenants, is the vast literature on different magical and occult practices. Occult practices of divination such as astrology, bibliomancy or the interpretation of dreams were widely used, and encyclopedists such as Taşköprüzâde (d. 1561) or Kâtib Çelebi described magic and divination as branches of science, following older taxonomies of knowledge. The Ottoman interpretations were based on the one hand on conjuring and commanding of jinn and demons, and on the other hand on knowing the secret hierarchy and relationship dominating all nature, from human beings to the metals, plants and stars. A major factor in this understanding of the world was what modern scholars call lettrism, a parallel to the Jewish and Christian Rennaissance Cabbala: the idea that Arabic letters, together with numbers, being a creation of God and forming the text of the Quran, itself not a creation but a property of God, had intrinsic significance and meaning and that their combinations could connect and control the astral and the sublunar world. This theory, expressed in great detail by the great thirteenth-century mysticist Ibn Arabi, is at the root of so-called talismanic science, conceived as a means of using combinations of letters to bend planetary influences for earthly aims.

In this, Ottoman magical literature follows the developments in Islamic occultism: throughout the late Middle Ages, the older magic of incantations and demonical summoning gave place to a more "organized" magic, based on astral and lettrist hierarchies. With works such as the *Ghayat al-hakim*, better known in the West under its Latin name *Picatrix*, and even more with the *corpus bunianum*, attributed to the famous al-Buni (d. 1225), even from the fourteenth century a belief in hierarchies and homologies connecting the different realms of nature was commonplace for erudite observers of the universe. This idea seems to have gained momentum in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, in tandem with European Renaissance occultism that

10 M. Kurz, *Ways to Heaven, Gates to Hell: Fażlīzāde ʿAlī's Struggle with the Diversity of Ottoman Islam* (Berlin 2011), 67–70.

had also stressed this approach. The study of these theories is still nascent, but Kâtib Çelebi's description is telling:

> The divination by the divine properties (*ilm al-havass*) is a science that concerns the properties that can be obtained by reading God's names and the books He made descend; there are properties peculiar to each of these names and prayers... I say, however, that the properties of things are established and that their causes are secret. Although we know that a magnet draws iron, we do not know why. All properties are thus; only the causes of some of them may be understood by the human mind, while others stay unknown. Now, these properties are divided into several categories: properties of the names that fall under the section on onomancy, properties of the letters that make up those names, properties of the charms that are used in magic, and properties of the Holy Quran... There are also [such] properties of the stars and of the signs of the zodiac, properties of the minerals, of the herbs, of the animals, of the climates and the cities, and so forth, as well as properties of habits, talismans and elixirs.

And this is how the same scholar speaks of magic (*ilm al-sihr*):

> This science has secret causes, and it is difficult for most minds. As for its real truth: men submit to it with tricks, and they are inclined to listen to the movements and the words of the magician. This way, the science [of magic] speaks of celestial changes and positions of the stars, of their special connection to earthly events, as well as to minerals, animals and plants, and of the existence of strange deeds and secrets emanating from this connection and blending, while the cause of all these remains unknown. So, the magician displays strange acts and wonderful situations, coupling some minerals, plants and animals at special times, according to the positions and movements of the stars and other heavenly bodies. Though such acts can be seen, their causes remain secret, and thus even the smartest human minds stay surprised and totally unable to explain their secrets.[11]

The amazing growth of lettrist, geomantic or oneiromantic methods in order to foretell the future or to influence natural phenomena might be associated with the general trend of the Islamicate world toward occultist interpretations, beginning with al-Buni's work in the thirteenth century; in Ottoman culture,

11 Kâtib Çelebi, *Keşf-el-zunun*, eds Ş. Yaltkaya and K. R. Bilge, 2 vols (n.l. [Istanbul] 1943; repr. Ankara 2014), I:725 (*ilmü'l-havass*), II:980 (*ilmü's-sihr*).

this trend was enhanced by the tremendous influence of Abdürrahman al-Bistami's (d. ca. 1455) works. A very illuminating example is a treatise on talismans, probably composed by the prominent historian and jurist (also *şeyhülislam*) Ibn Kemal or Kemalpaşazade (d. 1534), which presents a whole theory of such terrestrial and celestial interdependencies before proceeding to a more specific discussion of using talismans against plague; characteristically, the author considers talismanic a branch of natural philosophy.[12] Still, in the Ottoman case we do not detect a transition to another view, in which occult sciences belonged to the mathematical rather than natural sciences; this view, which implies an emphasis of their celestial, rather than terrestrial aspects, seems to have risen in the context of the growing status of occultism in Arabic and Iranian courts from the thirteenth century onwards. Almost all Ottoman encyclopaedias, however, with some important exceptions from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, adhere to the Aristotelian and Avicennian taxonomy, although they always accept the power and validity of occult knowledge (but not always their legitimacy). The science that attracts most of their criticism is astrology, due to the problems it posed for free will and predestination. Magic as such was usually considered illicit, but this did not extend to the science of letters, the invocation of divine names, the construction of talismans and so forth.

On the other hand, we must note that no "witch-hunting" seems to have ever occurred in the Ottoman lands. However, there is a couple of early eighteenth-century fetvas forbidding some forms of sorcery, especially those implying a desecration of the Holy Book:

> Zeyd the magician (*sahir*), maliciously puts the papers where the Quranic verses are written under the millstone and if it is certain by recourse to the Sharia that he is accustomed to grinding the grand verses under the millstone saying that "I wrenched one's head to this direction and I turned another's heart to that direction" and if he is apprehended before repentance, is it legitimate to execute Zeyd by *siyaset*? Answer: It is legitimate.[13]

12 A. T. Şen, "Practicing Astral Magic in Sixteenth-Century Ottoman Istanbul: A Treatise on Talismans Attributed to Ibn Kemāl", *Magic, Ritual, and Witchcraft*, 12:1 (2017), 66–88.

13 E. E. Tuşalp, "Treating Outlaws and Registering Miscreants in Early Modern Ottoman Society: A Study on the Legal Diagnosis of Deviance in *Şeyhülislam* Fatwas", unpublished M.A. thesis, Sabancı University, 2005, 71–72.

It is important to note, as always in history, that all these remarks must not be taken as meaning that Ottoman perceptions of the supernatural and the occult remained unaltered through time. For one thing, as we saw previously, these perceptions varied even in the same period, as Sufis (or, better put, some of the Sufis) had different perceptions than the jurisprudents (ulema) or, perhaps, the artisanal classes. On the other hand, there are signs of a retreat of occult explanations after the mid-seventeenth century; it seems that the relevant debates were alive in Ottoman society as far as the end of the eighteenth century at least, but more study is necessary to elucidate this trend. For instance, we see a tendency towards more rationalistic interpretations of illnesses and cures in Ottoman medicine, culminating in Abbas Vesim's (d. 1767) almost materialistic views; it also appears that "deistic" and even materialist trends were present among Ottoman scholars, especially from the late seventeenth century onwards: there are several testimonies, both Western and Ottoman, of thinkers who suggested that human beings are born and die upon earth just as plants do and that "nature" governed all reality.[14]

Thus, the intertwining of popular beliefs with Sufi culture and with ulema and independent/artisanal scholarship made specific phenomena being 'pushed' in different categories according to social groups and historical periods; it is exactly this procedure that may prove to be a very fertile target of research. On a more general level, the themes of rationality and irrationality may be studied under the light of the Weberian idea on the "disenchantment of the world" brought about in Western Europe by the Reformation and the intellectual and political developments of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. There is a lively discussion of the character or even the existence of this process, but very little research has been done so far on the Ottoman counterpart. Conversely, another debate has been underway since the early 1990s, on Reinhard Schulze's thesis of an eighteenth-century "Islamic Enlightenment" (*islamische Aufklärung*). In this context, one might argue that even "revivalist" (or "pietistic") movements such as the seventeenth-century Ottoman Kadızâdelis were characterized by a rationalist trend in various aspects and even played the part of a primary agent in a process of a "disenchantment of the world" (to use the controversial

14 M. Sariyannis, "The Limits of Going Global: The Case of 'Ottoman Enlightenment(s)'", *History Compass*, 5 (2020) 18:e12623 https://doi.org/10.1111/hic3.12623

term coined by Max Weber).[15] Over the course of their acute debate with some Sufi fraternities, who were in turn attempting to assume the role of privileged interlocutors with the supernatural, the Kadızadeli preachers denied them this access by rebutting a series of supernatural apparitions in everyday life, such as the miracles by sheikhs or the visitation of saints' graves. Thus, the Kadızadelis confined the supernatural to a specific zone, distant in both space and time: namely, God's acts and the era of the prophets. One may see this process as a conflict between a Sufi culture, which during the seventeenth and eighteenth century seems to have considered everyday life more enchanted than ever, and a "puritan Islam", which by placing emphasis on the individual and thus attacking belief in miracles contributes to "disenchantment", whereas an artisanal and mercantile culture was using increasingly scientific tools.

To sum up, the major **objectives** of the research could be set as follows:

(a) to explore the meaning and content of what the Ottomans (or, more accurately, different social and cultural groups) meant by "marvelous", "strange" or "extraordinary", and, vice versa, the correspondent notions that covered what we now describe as "supernatural/preternatural" and "irrational";

(b) to specify the Ottoman attitude(s) against beliefs in such phenomena or practice of such methods, both holy (e.g. miracles of dervishes) and suspect (magic, witchcraft);

(c) to localize these beliefs in the Ottoman *Weltanschauung*; or rather, in the various Ottoman systems of thought: for instance, to show how different authors might attribute such phenomena to actions by the jinn or, alternatively, to a secret interaction of the cosmic elements;

(d) to analyze the various ways that changes took place from the mid-seventeenth century onwards. Namely, to seek answers to questions such as: were certain phenomena being pushed from the field of "inexplicable" to the field of "marvelous" (or, to the field of "mythical")? Can one speak of a trend to "rationalize" the image of the world, and in what terms? Can the Weberian notion of "disenchantment" be applied in an Ottoman context?

15 Sariyannis, "The Limits of Going Global".

(e) to associate these changes with emerging or declining layers of culture and specific social groups (ulema, Sufi brotherhoods, emerging urban strata), in connection with the social changes and especially with the emergence of new levels and forms of a self-conscious artisanal and urban stratum throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

The research programme we envisage, thus, would first study the terminology used, by tracing the history and the semantic shifts in terms denoting nature (*tabi'at, ghayb*), miracles (and the *kharik al-ada*), the preternatural (*aja'ib / ghara'ib*), and of course magic (*sihr, rukya, simya*...). Then, one should examine what now we would call the "supernatural" field: miracles, of both prophets and saints, from the point of view of theological thought, of Sufism, of the Kadızadeli thought or of Kâtib Çelebi's rationality; the relationship of the dead and the living, through dreams, the world of souls and the various intermediate worlds envisaged by Sufi thought (*melekut, jabarut* etc). A special place should be reserved for a study of various world visions: of the science of letters, of the role of stars, of the homologies and hierarchies of the microcosm and the macrocosm. In the same vein, we should conduct research on the "preternatural" field: i.e., marvels and their explanation, the role of Hermeticism and esotericism, theories on "strong souls" and the jinn; and, last but not least, the possible (one cannot yet be certain) gradual expansion of the natural sciences as a legitimate means by which to interpret more and more phenomena of nature, which were thus moved from the sphere of inexplicable to the explicable and perhaps controllable.

All of this concerns the conceptualization of phenomena conceived as beyond the regular and the explicable. A second direction of research should study efforts and techniques designed in order to establish human control over such phenomena. We should then examine Ottoman occult sciences: divination, magic, astrology, alchemy and so forth; their epistemology, their place in the taxonomy of knowledge and the rationale beyond their foundation and use: the limits of possible human influence, the relationship with vernacular practices and so forth. Debates on the illicitness or the reliability of occult sciences (for instance, critics of astrology) are of course highly relevant to the subject. Also, one could focus in the relations between the technological knowledge and what has been called the "occult mentality": for instance, views on the utility of practical knowledge, the role of occult technology (e.g. the construction of talismans) as a motive for accurate observations and vice versa,

the possible emergence of a new imagery of the world through technological metaphors (such as clockwork).

One would hope that such a research agenda would bring forth great steps in our knowledge of Ottoman mentalities and cultural history in general.