

A. Editorial

Enchantments and disenchantments in Ottoman world visions: preliminary remarks

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We are extremely happy to present the second issue of “*Aca’ib: Occasional Papers on the Ottoman Perceptions of the Supernatural*”, 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. In the year that passed since our first issue, the research team, which 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 Ahmet Tunç Şen (Columbia University, USA), as well as two Ph.D. candidates (Dimitris Giagtzoğlu, Markos Litinas), some MA students and our technical staff, was enriched by another member, N. Işık Demirakın, post-doctoral fellow at the Institute for Mediterranean Studies/

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FORTH. This year has not been easy, as international circumstances continued to set a heavy shadow over scientific activities, including meetings and research trips; however, we tried to do our share of presentations and conference participations, which the reader may follow through the “News” section of our site (<https://ghost.ims.forth.gr/news/>).

In this vein, we are happy to announce that our project will organize the eleventh international symposium of the highly prestigious series of “Halcyon Days in Crete”, organized since 1991 by the Department of Ottoman History of the Institute for Mediterranean Studies/Foundation for Research and Technology-Hellas (for a list of previous Symposia and the consequent publications, the reader may visit our webpage at the following link: <https://ims.forth.gr/en/department/view?id=1>). The symposium will finally take place online (Zoom link to be announced) on 14–16 January 2022 (it was to happen on January 2021 but had to be postponed due to the pandemic) with the topic ‘Enchantments and disenchantments: early modern Ottoman visions of the world’. Some thoughts on this topic, which is directly related to the subject of the “GHOST” project, follow.¹

As historiographical debates on a “global Enlightenment” intensified during the last decades, usually focusing on aspects of the intellectual history of the non-European world in the age of modernity, a discussion on the development of Islamic culture in the Ottoman world also arose. The concept of an “Islamic Enlightenment” was proposed, discussed and largely abandoned, although literature on Ottoman science continues to emphasize the developments demonstrating a transition from an “occultist” to a “scientific” mentality from the late seventeenth or the early eighteenth century onwards. Rather than insisting on the notion of cultural transfer, such studies sought to illuminate the intrinsic, “bottom-up” ways in which a new vision of the world gradually permeated at least some segments of Ottoman society.

Perhaps even more than scientific developments, one can speak of changes at the street level, changes that had to do with the presence of the supernatural in quotidian life, the degree one had control over one’s life or destiny, the availability and accessibility of truth and so forth. There are signs showing an “occultisation” of knowledge in a wide array of fields during the fourteenth, the fifteenth

1 I tried to explore some aspects of the topic in M. Sariyannis, “The Limits of Going Global: the Case of ‘Ottoman Enlightenment(s)’”, *History Compass* 2020;18:e12623, <https://doi.org/10.1111/hic3.12623>

and at least part of the sixteenth centuries; and it has been remarked that for certain Sufi fraternities, the world had become more and more an enchanted place by the early seventeenth century. On the other hand, the appearance of new legitimate sources of knowledge by the middle of the same century and an apparent emphasis on individual reasoning, as well as the rejection of alleged Sufi miracles by the Kadızadeli movement in favour of a strict, scriptural understanding of religion, were arguably steps toward what Max Weber would call a gradual (and partial) disenchantment of the Ottoman world.

The Symposium will seek to explore these aspects of Ottoman intellectual, cultural and social history, using a variety of approaches, sources and methods. Thus, it aspires to provide insights into the varying and shifting Ottoman images of nature and the supernatural, searching not for a unilineal progress toward “secularism” or “rationalism”, but rather for the sociocultural configurations of parallel paths that modified the *Weltanschauung* of Ottoman individuals and communities. By studying the emergence and development of different regimes of truth from the early fourteenth to the late eighteenth centuries, it seeks to investigate whether, and how, Ottoman perceptions of nature and science transformed toward a more “enchanted” or a more “disenchanted” world in the early modern period.

Furthermore, another issue that we cannot address here in full concerns Ottoman views on the sources of knowledge. In short, we have understood knowledge as being produced by revelation, prophetic or saintly (or visionary), ancient wisdom, often with hermetic overtones, and reasoning. Of course, these sources do not exclude each other, as, for instance, reason can be quite legitimately used to elaborate revelation (for example in theology); nor does even such a rationalist author as Kâtib Çelebi reject visionary illumination. However, claims as to the preeminence of such sources played a crucial role in Ottoman intellectual history, as they could determine who had legitimate access to things hidden. Moreover, they were closely related to major trends of thought: the Kadızadeli and Nakşebendi emphasis on human agency and piety (and on the absence of revelation in present times), the Halveti (and others’) claim for continuous contact with the supernatural, and the *işrakî* or Illuminationist combination of revelatory and hermetic knowledge with rational science, not to mention some materialist tendencies noted but insufficiently studied so far.

A similar but not identical issue concerns the various traditions of knowledge coexisting in the Ottoman context. Whereas the question of sources re-

fers to gnosiology, tradition is perhaps more relevant for intellectual history. By tradition, I refer here to an “origin myth”, a symbolic narrative attributing at least certain branches of knowledge to a series of thinkers and/or visionaries who offer their prestige both to a science and its practitioners. Thus, there is undoubtedly an “Islamic” tradition which comprises not only knowledge on matters theological, but also cosmology and even ancient history. There is also an “ancient” tradition, often informed by hermetic beliefs, that claims access to a corpus of knowledge discovered by or revealed to the wise philosophers of (mostly Greek, but also, in the case of magic, Indian or Chinese) antiquity. Finally, one may speak of a European tradition inasmuch as scholars such as Kâtip Çelebi did not endorse, or rather did not apply fully, the methodology used by their European colleagues, but nonetheless used their works and conclusions as yet another authoritative source of knowledge.

The papers presented at the symposium will be published in a peer-reviewed volume, expected to appear in 2024. A short report on the symposium will appear in the next issue of *Aca'ib*. We plan to organize yet another conference in the context of the GHOST project in 2023. For the time being, we humbly offer the current issue and hope to present even richer material for our third issue, scheduled for the Fall of 2022.