Knowledge and control of the future in Ottoman thought

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What is not nature, i.e. what is inexplicable and uncontrollable, is often described in Islamicate thought as *ghayb*, "hidden"; and if something is hidden, even from our modern point of view, it is the future. Yet, perhaps the most ancient and perennial from among the branches of occult knowledge is the foretelling of the future: divination, soothsaying, visionary practices. All of these have the main aim of predicting the future, be it with scientific methods or with the assistance of supernatural entities. One may speak of two aspects of the "future", one that can be predicted in the short term and another, in the long term, which belongs to God's plan on humanity and can be known only

* Research for this article was made under the research project "GHOST: Geographies and Histories of the Ottoman Supernatural Tradition: Exploring Magic, the Marvelous, and the Strange in Ottoman Mentalities" (funded by the European Research Council, CoGr2017 no. 771766).

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

Sariyannis, Marinos. 2020. "Knowledge and Control of the Future in Ottoman Thought". *Aca'ib: Occasional papers on the Ottoman perceptions of the supernatural* 1, 49–84.

DOI: https://doi.org/10.26225/weyr-2s98

by revelation. Yet, while Christian philosophy has dealt with this distinction,[1] Muslim authors did less so, although the issue of causality and its role for predestination and free will was debated in detail.[2] The present paper will seek to make a survey of the ways Ottomans tried to predict future events; of the discussions on whether this is possible for ordinary human beings; and, finally, of the techniques developed to have a certain degree of control over them.

Early Ottoman literature had not one, but several visions of the future; there was the belief in a divinely ordained mission to expand *dar al-Islam*, evident in the last sections of fifteenth and early sixteenth century historians; a noteworthy example is a treatise of a Halveti sheikh, Ibrahim al-Kırımî (d. 1593), in which a series of circles of "ascent" and "descent" (the latter with no sense of decline whatsoever), concerning the divine enlightenment of the individual, are also used to interpret universal history.[3] On the other hand, an opposition against Mehmed the Conqueror's imperial and universalist vision seems to have promoted a gloomy vision of the future, where the appropriation of the Byzantine imperial tradition by the Ottomans was bound to end in disaster: some legendary histories of pre-Ottoman Constantinople, which circulated widely in the late fifteenth and again in the mid-sixteenth century, concentrate on tales of corruption and immorality that brought about the city's eventual destruction. In this way, they were implying that the Ottomans should never

1 See S. Schmolinsky, "The Production of the Future. Chronotope and Agency in the Middle Ages", *Historical Social Research*, 38/3 (2013), 93–104.

2 On these debates see F. Griffel, *Al-Ghazālī's Philosophical Theology* (Oxford 2009), 123ff; H. K. Altun, "Osmanlı müelliflerince yazılan kazâ-kader risâleleri ve Taşköprüzâde'nin *Risâle fi'l-Kazâ ve'l-Kader* adlı eseri", unpublished MA thesis, Marmara University, 2010; Ph. Bruckmayr, "The Particular Will (*al-irâdât al-juziyya*): Excavations Regarding a Latecomer in Kalâm Terminology on Human Agency and its Position in Naqshbandi Discourse", *European Journal of Turkish Studies*, 13 (2011), online in http://journals.openedition.org/ejts/4601; M. F. Kılıç, "An Analysis of the Section on Causality in Khojazāda's *Tahafūt*", *Nazariyat: Journal for the History of Islamic Philosophy and Sciences*, 3:1 (2016), 43-76; E. L. Menchinger, "Freewill, Predestination, and the Fate of the Ottoman Empire", *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 77:3 (2016), 445–466.

3 M. M. Yakubovych, "A Neglected Ottoman Sufi Treatise from 16th Century: *Mawāhib al-Raḥman fi bayān Marātib al-Akwān* by Ibrāhīm al-Qirīmī", *OA*, 45 (2015), 137–160. On al-Kırımî see also D. Terzioğlu, "Power, Patronage, and Confessionalism: Ottoman Politics Through the Eyes of a Crimean Sufi, 1580-1593", in M. Sariyannis (ed.), *Political Thought and Practice in the Ottoman Empire* (Rethymno 2019), 149–186.

make that city the seat of their empire.[4] Written in all probability shortly after 1453, *Dürr-i meknûn* ("Hidden Pearls"), a synopsis of Islamic cosmology and mythology commonly (but, most probably, wrongly) attributed to Yazıcıoğlu Ahmed Bican (d. after 1466),[5] constantly implies (mostly while describing societies distant in both time and place, such as Khwarezm or mythical lands) that the end of the world is near due to imminent corruption. The author notes a hadith, according to which the Prophet had stated that the signs of the End of Days would begin to appear after the 900th year of the Hegira, i.e. 1494/95. This does not necessarily mean that the end was imminent; it may have been a warning for people to mend their ways, all the more since these signs are not peculiar to the Ottoman fifteenth century, belonging to a long eschatological tradition in Islam.[6] Such predictability was, in a paradoxical pre-modern way, based on what was conceived as historical experience; eschatological tradition was part of the apocalyptic religion and, as such, part and parcel of the given context in which the world was to be understood.

Yet, apart from eschatological themes, Ottoman historians and scholars also sought a more "secular" way to expand the view of history toward the future; applying the axiom of *historia magistra vitae*, they explored the possibility of short- and middle-term predictions through a deep knowledge of past events. Christopher Markiewicz demonstrated recently that, at the beginning of the Ottoman period, the discipline of history had only newly gained an elevated status among other sciences;[7] although still considered a branch of the literary sciences (*adab*), by the early fifteenth century there had already been explicit references to its usefulness for finding "the appropriate course of future

4 S. Yérasimos, *La fondation de Constantinople et de Sainte-Sophie dans les traditions turques* (Paris 1990), esp. 84-85, 154-59, 194ff., 201ff. Some of these legends continued to circulate during subsequent centuries as well, but we should not necessarily seek anti-imperial attitudes in the authors who incorporated them into their chronicles.

5 L. Kaptein, *Ahmed Bican*, *Dürr-i Meknun: kritische Edition mit Kommentar* (Asch 2007), 45-47 (on the authorship); C. Grenier, "Reassessing the Authorship of the *Dürr-i Meknūn*", *ArchOtt*, 35 (2018), 193–211.

6 Cf. Yérasimos, *La fondation de Constantinople*, 195-196.

7 C. Markiewicz, "History as Science: The Fifteenth-Century Debate in Arabic and Persian", *Journal of Early Modern History*, 21 (2017), 216–240.

action".[8] By the late sixteenth century, the apocalyptic climate of the year 1000 of Hijra, but more importantly the socio-economic crisis, led to authors such as Mustafa Ali (d. 1600) favouring a "dynastic cyclism": this attitude is particularly evident in his *Füsûl-i hall ü akd ve usûl-i harc ü nakd* ("The seasons of sovereignty on the principles of critical expenditure"), a short history of the Islamic world from 622 to 1592,[9] where, as shown by Cornell Fleischer, dynasties follow a steady pattern of rise and fall.[10] Ali, however, does not use the notion of laws of history that would inevitably lead to the fall of every dynasty or state; he maintains that the aim of his work was to demonstrate how a dynasty can be corrupted and how its fall can be prevented.[11]

> It is written in a number of histories... that because there is no permanency in the highest heaven and decay and transience fixed in the constellations of the crystalline sphere... there is no culture that violent fate does not repeatedly destroy and ruin.[12]

For Ali, dynasties may have a time-span allotted to them, dependent on their corruption and injustice; the Ottoman dynasty, however, has special graces bestowed by God and can be perpetuated provided the Sultans keep their lands under justice and good order.[13]

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8 Markiewicz, "History as Science", 231. This assertion, by the Timurid historian Hâfız-i Abrû, seems to have been an exception to more conservative understandings of history prevailing up to the late sixteenth century (see e.g. ibid., 234–235 on İdris-i Bitlisî).

9 Ali, *Gelibolulu Mustafa Âlî, Füsûl-i hall ü akd ve usûl-i harc ü nakd (İslam devletleri tarihi, 622-1599)*, ed. M. Demir (Istanbul 2006); cf. C. H. Fleischer, "Royal Authority, Dynastic Cyclism, and "Ibn Khaldûnism" in Sixteenth-Century Ottoman Letters", *Journal of Asian and African studies*, 18:3–4 (1983), 198–220, at 177–178 and 301ff.; M. Şeker, "Political view of 'Âlî: Evaluation of the work of 'Âlî so-called 'Fusul-i harj u naqd'", in D. Panzac (ed.), *Histoire économique et sociale de l'Empire ottoman et de la Turquie (1326–1960). Actes du sixième congrès international tenu à Aix-en-Provence du 1er au 4 juillet 1992* (Paris 1995), 855–864.

10 Fleischer, "Royal Authority", esp. 206-216; J. Schmidt, *Pure Water for Thirsty Muslims. A Study of Mustafâ 'Âlî of Gallipoli's* Künhü'l-ahbâr (Leiden 1991), 144–151.

11 *Gelibolulu Mustafa Âlî, Füsûl-i hall ü akd*, ed. Demir, 60; M. Sariyannis, *A History of Ottoman Political Thought up to the Early Nineteenth Century* (Leiden 2019), 160–161.

12 Quoted in Schmidt, *Pure Water*, 145.

13 On this "exceptionalism under conditions" see Fleischer, "Royal Authority", 178; B. Tezcan, *The Second Ottoman Empire: Political and Social Transformation in the Early Modern World* (Cambridge – New York 2010), 57; Sariyannis, *Ottoman Political Thought*, 163–165.

It was not until the mid-seventeenth century that a sense of historical laws making the future somehow predictable by historians appeared in Ottoman letters: and it was again Kâtib Çelebi who made this step, by adopting Ibn Khaldun's theory of history and presenting it in two different versions of his work. In his political tract *Düstürü'l-amel li ıslahi'l-halel* ("Course of measures to redress the situation") and more extensively in *Takvîmü't-tevârîh* ("Chronicle of histories"), a world history chronicle compiled in 1648, Kâtib Çelebi identified Ibn Khaldun's dynasty (*dawla*) with not just state but society at large; using a complex medical simile, he then adapted Ibn Khaldun's conception of stages into an anthropomorphic vision, where a society would inevitably grow and decay and where this decay could only be delayed by a wise statesman who would apply appropriate measures just as a doctor administers appropriate medicine for each human age.[14] Perhaps influenced by Ibn Khaldun's thought, Kâtib Çelebi also put forth a number of "laws of history", which can safely be applied to future developments. For instance, a patricidal ruler never survived more than a year in power; viziers or chieftains who opened a ruler's way to the throne very often found their death at the latter's hands; and the sixth ruler in every dynasty lost his throne (which in the Ottoman case would relate to Murad II's abdication in favor of his son, Mehmed II).[15] Under the influence of Kâtib Çelebi, Ibn Khaldunist conception of the state stages became a commonplace in many works that followed, especially after the much more analytical exposition of Ibn Khaldun's theory by Na'ima (d. 1714).

> Let it be known that the divine custom and God's will have ordained that the situation of every state and community is always settled in a uniform manner; it does not stay perpetually on one path, but instead moves through several periods (from one situation) to a renewed one... Thus, the different periods of a state cannot usually exceed five stages.[16]

14 Sariyannis, *Ottoman Political Thought*, 287–295; Idem, "Ottoman Ibn Khaldunism Revisited: the Pre-Tanzimat Reception of the *Muqaddima*, from Kınalızade to Şanizade", in M. Sariyannis (ed.), *Political Thought and Practice in the Ottoman Empire. Halcyon Days in Crete IX: A Symposium Held in Rethymno, 9–11 January 2015* (Rethymno 2019), 251–286, at 259–261.

15 Sariyannis, *Ottoman Political Thought*, 289; Idem, "Ottoman Ibn Khaldunism Revisited", 261.

16 Na'ima, *Târih-i Na'imâ (Ravzatü'l-Hüseyn fî hulâsati ahbâri'l-hâfikayn)*, ed. M. İpşirli (Ankara 2007), 1:26.

Arguably this emphasis on historical laws may have contributed to a new thrust, throughout the eighteenth century, of theological debates on the limits of causality and the role of individual will.[17] Of course, although establishing a partial predictability of the future through history seems to have been a common denominator of Ottoman thought from the late seventeenth century on, the exceptionalism prevailing meant that there were problems in foretelling a future fall of the dynasty. Various authors responded in different ways to this problem: Ibn Khaldun's translator, the *şeyhülislam* Pirizade Mehmed Sahib Efendi (d. 1749), remarked that the Ottoman state is "eternal" and had by then already exceeded by far the time-span of 120 years set by Ibn Khaldun; others preferred to place the Ottomans in an intermediate rather than a final stage, while Kâtib Çelebi or Na'ima saw hope in administering the right measures (e.g. an interval of peace, for the latter) in order to prolong the time span ordained by historical law.[18]

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Other visions of the future were less informed by historical experience, as they drew on a privileged contact with the supernatural; and these were usually more optimistic, although sometimes containing sharp criticism of their contemporary realities. There were a number of ways in which one could claim access to the supernatural world and, therefore, to knowledge of future events. One could categorize these ways, roughly, into three large categories: there were predictions based on a direct contact with the *ghayb*, through dreams or visions or, at any rate, miraculous epiphanies; predictions based on occult sciences connecting the Written Word, the Qur'an, with the world, namely the science of letters; and predictions based on a more materialistic (yet occult) perception of universal hierarchies, namely an astrological conception of the world.[19]

17 Menchinger, "Freewill, Predestination". Cf. also M. Kurz, *Ways to heaven, gates to hell. Fazlîzâde 'Alî's struggle with the diversity of Ottoman Islam* (Berlin 2011), 160ff., 193–194; Bruckmayr, "The Particular Will".

18 Sariyannis, "Ottoman Ibn Khaldunism Revisited", 273, 285.

19 On pre-Ottoman ways of foretelling future political events see A. Mazor, "The *Topos* of Predicting the Future in Early Mamluk Historiography", in S. Conermann (ed.), *Mamluk Historiography Revisited – Narratological Perspectives* (Göttingen 2018), 103–119.

The first category, visionary knowledge, was the most popular one; it required no special training or technical vocabulary, although it could also be based on an elaborate and complex philosophical background. I am referring mainly to dream interpretation, a practice completely legitimate in Islamic theology.[20] Indeed, oneiromancy was perhaps the most "democratic" of all occult sciences, since (the existence of elaborate handbooks notwithstanding) everybody could interpret a dream without claiming either any specialized erudition or supernatural (recte: prophetic) powers. The well-known motto, that "dreams constitute the one forty-sixth of prophecy", gave dream interpretation a status of pious science. Moreover, one could provoke a divinatory dream; this was the practice known as *istihâre*, asking God to select and decide between two or more courses by a dream or omen. We see Mustafa Ali relating how he "went to bed with the *istihare* of such-and-such question (*... deyu istihâre ile yatdım*)"; the answer comes "in the world of dreams" (*'âlem-i rü'yâda*).[21] The most well-known case of *istihare*, of course, is Evliya Çelebi's dream of advice, when he reportedly asked the Prophet for "travels" (*seyahat*) instead of "mediation" (*sefahat*).[22] Divinatory dreams abound in Ottoman literature, especially in saints' and scholars' biographies.[23] Those who could successfully interpret a dream were not necessarily saintly figures: Evliya claims a whole series of such interpretations made by himself, especially in dreams of his patron Melek Ahmed Pasha.[24] As for Mustafa Ali, again, he narrates with pride how he interpreted a dream

20 The literature is quite extensive. See e.g. T. Fahd, *La divination arabe : études religieuses, sociologiques et folkloriques sur le milieu natif de l'islam* (Leiden 1966), 247–367; P. Lory, *Le rêve et ses interprétations en Islam* (Paris 2003); Ö. Felek and A. Knysh (eds), *Dreams and Visions in Islamic Societies* (New York 2012). On Ottoman oneiromancy, see C. Kafadar, *Asiye Hatun: Rüya mektupları* (Istanbul 1994); A. Niyazioğlu, "Rüyaların söyledikleri", in H. Aynur and A. Niyazioğlu (eds), *Aşık Çelebi ve şairler tezkiresi üzerine yazılar* (Istanbul 2010); Ö. Felek, "(Re)creating Image and Identity: Dreams and Visions as a Means of Murad III's Self-Fashioning", in Felek and Knysh, *Dreams and Visions*.

21 Ali, *Gelibolulu Mustafa Âlî ve* Künhü'l-ahbâr*'inda II. Selim, III. Murad ve III. Mehmet devirleri*, ed. F. Çerçi, 3 vols (Kayseri 2000), II:146.

22 Kafadar, *Asiye Hatun*, 37-38.

23 Niyazioğlu, "Rüyaların söyledikleri"; Idem, *Dreams and Lives in Ottoman Istanbul: A Seventeenth-Century Biographer's Perspective* (London – New York 2019).

24 R. Dankoff (with a historical introduction by R. Murphey), *The Intimate Life of an Ottoman Statesman, Melek Ahmed Pasha (1588-1662) as Portrayed in Evliya Çelebi's* Book of Travels (*Seyahat-name*) (New York 1991), 16–17, 69–70, 100–101, 143–146 etc.

seen by some "magnates and notables" foretelling Murad III's death.[25] On the other hand, not all dreams were considered divinatory, nor were all dreamers equally prone to have such capabilities. All oneiromancy manuals stressed the fact that dreams might come from God, from Satan or just from bodily causes.[26] As Akhisarî (or Saruhanî) Şeyh Mecdüddin İsa (d. 1531), a prominent Anatolian Bayrami dervish, explains, most of the common people (*avamm*) see phantasies (*hayal*); only dreams of attained Sufis can be trusted.[27] Similar categorizations are evident in the letters of Mahmud Hüdayî (d. 1628), who interpreted a number of dreams seen by sultans of his era.[28] In a combination bringing to mind geomancy, dreams were often interpreted through complex systems of transformations, where the name of a person seen in a dream would be translated to a numerical value, which then (often after a series of successive subtractions) would correspond to a certain clue to the future.[29]

Thanks to the work undertaken by scholars such as Cemal Kafadar, Aslı Niyazioğlu or Özgen Felek, dream interpretation constitutes perhaps the most densely studied Ottoman occult practice. Among the many Ottoman manuals, mostly following Artemidorus' and Ibn Sirin's tradition, few if any have been published (al-Nabulusi's late seventeenth-century treatise being one of them);[30] on the other hand, editions and studies of actual dream collections abound, ranging from anonymous scribes and women with Sufi tendencies to

25 *Gelibolulu Mustafa Âlî ve* Künhü'l-ahbâr*'ında*, ed. Çerçi, III: 622.

26 This distinction comes from the Hellenistic Artemidorus, who speaks of *enhypnion*, significant of things in the present, and *oneiros*, which is significant of the future, as well as of dreams coming from the body or from the soul. Artemidorus, *Artemidorus'* Oneirocritica. *Text, Translation and Commentary*, ed. D. E. Harris-McCoy (Oxford 2012), 47–49.

27 İlyas b. İsa Akhisarî Saruhanî, *Şeyh İsa menâkıbnâmesi (XVI. Yüzyıl)*, ed. R. Muslu and S. Küçük (Akhisar 2010), 75-77. In another instance, he explains that dreams of opium-eaters cannot be trusted: *Şeyh İsa menâkıbnâmesi*, ed. Muslu and Küçük, 224–225.

28 M. S. Güven, "Çeşitli yönleriyle Azîz Mahmûd Hüdâyî'nin mektupları", unpublished MA thesis, Marmara University, 1992, 129–130 and annex p. 61–62.

29 J. Schmidt, "The Occult Sciences and their Importance in Ottoman Culture; Evidence from Turkish Manuscripts in Dutch Public Collections", *OA*, 23 (2003), 219–254 at 246; F. Turan, "Eski bir Türkçe tabirnâmede *ebced* hesabı", *Bir: Türk Dünyasi Incelemeleri Dergisi*, 9:10 (1998), 671–684.

30 'Abdel-Ghani al-Nâboulsî, *Merveilles de l'interprétation des rêves*, ed. A. Haridi (Paris 2012).

no less than Sultan Murad III himself.[31] The studies mentioned highlighted the fluidity of states of mind between sleep and wakefulness: a whole series of terms (*rüya*, *vakı'a*, *ilham*), meaning "vision" or "epiphany", covered various states of conscience which now would be described as half-asleep or half-awake. For instance, most of Mahmud Hüdayî's dreams were experienced while he was dozing off.[32] Apart from dreams complete, voices could be heard, glimpses could be seen, and presences could be sensed. Murad III often heard God's voice praising him; most often, it was dead people that appeared giving advice or a taste of the Hereafter.[33] One century later, the Damascene sheikh al-Nabulusi had to warn against taking *ilham* (but also dreams) as something more than a strictly personal revelation, especially against their use as binding argument for legal rulings;[34] such debates seem to have been recurring in the early eighteenth century as well.[35]

If one was to seek a rational explanation of how such apparitions, visions and dreams connected the soul with the supernatural, there were less or more elaborate theories. Perhaps the most refined one, originating in al-Suhrawardi and Ibn Arabi's philosophy, postulated that beside the corporeal world of physical entities (*âlem-i mulk*) there is a spiritual world (*âlem-i ceberût*), a world of images (*âlem-i misâl*), where one finds oneself while dreaming, and an incorporeal world (*âlem-i melekût*), the world of God and of angels, where

31 C. H. Fleischer, "Secretaries' Dreams: Augury and Angst in Ottoman Scribal Service", in I. Baldauf and S. Faroqhi (eds), *Armağan -Festschrift für Andreas Tietze* (Praha 1994), 77–88; Kafadar, *Asiye Hatun*; Ö. Felek, *Kitâbü'l-menâmât: Sultan III. Murad'ın rüya mektupları* (Istanbul 2012).

32 Güven, "Çeşitli yönleriyle Azîz Mahmûd Hüdâyî'nin mektupları", 131 and annex p. 14, 28.

33 Niyazioğlu, *Dreams and Lives*, 91ff.; *Şeyh İsa menâkıbnâmesi*, ed. Muslu and Küçük, 177-179.

34 J. P. Allen, "Reading Mehmed Birgivî with ʿAbd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī: Contested Interpretations of Birgivî's al-Ṭarīqa al-Muḥammadīya in the 17th-18th Century Ottoman Empire", in L. Demiri and S. Pagani (eds), *Early Modern Trends in Islamic Theology: ʿAbd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī and his Network of Scholarship* (Tübingen forthcoming).

35 M. Gel, "Debating Sufi Knowledge in the Eighteenth-Century Ottoman Thought: An Analysis of the Saçaḳlīzāde-ʿAlamī Debate on Divine Inspiration (*ʿilm al-ladunn*)", *Nazariyat*, 4:3 (2018), 119–168.

one goes after death.[36] Ottoman versions of this theory were often simpler or differed, sometimes lacking the world of images. According to Şükrullah Efendi, for instance, there are three spheres: the world of *ceberût*, the world of *melekût* and the world of angels. The first world is the divine sphere, the essence of the Creator of Existence (*vacibü'l-vücûd*), inaccessible to human knowledge; only with great effort can the intellect and the soul have a glimpse of the properties of God. The world of *melekût* has been called "world of truth", "world of reality", "world of meaning", but also "world of the occult" (*gayb*). The essence of this world is the emanation (*feyz*) of the world of *ceberût*. Finally, the world of angels is in fact the visible and created world: its essence is the world of the bodies and of the senses. Now man's nature combines the two latter worlds: the soul, the intellect and the spirit belong to the world of meaning (the *melekût*), whereas the body belongs to the world of forms (the angel world).[37] The human spirit (its component tending toward the good and the divine, that is), though, may be informed of the world of *ceberût*.[38] The world of images, identified with the more ambiguous term of *barzakh* or intermediary sphere, is also seen as the origin of dreams and the place the souls of the just resided after death in Niyazi-i Mısri's (d. 1694) work.[39]

In addition to dreams and dream-like visions, recourse to instant divine inspiration may also be considered a form of visionary divination. I refer to practices such as bibliomancy, various forms of divination and even geomancy; the latter is arguably the most "scientific" of these practices, however it was also based on attaining a status of inspiration at the moment one drew the initial signs, which then would be explained after a series of specific trans-

36 *EI*², s.v. "'Alam" (L. Gardet); F. Rahman, "Dream, Imagination and *'Ālām al-mit<u>h</u>āl*", *Islamic Studies*, 3 (1964), 167–180; H. Corbin, « Le songe visionnaire en spiritualité islamique », dans R. Caillois and C. E. Grunebaum (éds), *Le Rêve et les sociétés humaines* (Paris 1967), pp. 380–406.

37 Şükrullah Efendi, *Behcetü't-tevârîh: tarihin aydınlığında*, ed. H. Almaz (Istanbul 2010), 87.

38 *Behcetü't-tevârîh*, ed. Almaz, 91. See also e.g. Güven, "Çeşitli yönleriyle Azîz Mahmûd Hüdâyî'nin mektupları", annex 139 and 13–14.

39 D. Terzioğlu, "Sufi and dissident in the Ottoman Empire: Niyazi Misri (1618-1694)", unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 1999, 377, 386; Kurz, *Ways to Heaven*, 117. Cf. Kınalızâde Ali Çelebi, *Ahlâk-ı Alâî*, ed. M. Koç (Istanbul 2007), 91: "*berzah âleminde... âlem-i misâlden müstemeddir*". On the identification of barzakh with the "world of images" by Ibn Arabî see *EI*³, s.v. "Barzakh, Ṣūfī understanding" (S. Bashier).

formations.[40] Ibn Khaldun describes divination as the lowest echelon of prophetic practice, being a divine gift granted to privileged individuals. According to al-Qazwini, among the human souls some possess the faculty of knowing the names of the spirits: these souls are those of prophets and saints, of physiognomists, and of soothsayers, who "receive spiritual knowledge and see through it the contingencies of beings which appear in dreams and in other manifestations". The point that underlies beneath all these methods is (in Maria Mavroudi's words) "to allow divine providence, in the form of chance, to intervene in order to help humans predict the future or reach a decision".[41] Even in this aspect, however, the main problem caused by all divinatory practices in Islam—and, for that matter, in all monotheistic religions as well as in other philosophical systems—is that by foreseeing the future they challenge man's moral freedom, be it for sin or for salvation.[42]

Even Quranic bibliomancy, i.e. divination through the holy text of Islam, was regarded as illicit, although there had been numerous attempts of putting forth "licit" methods. One of them, *istikẖara*, was based on the idea of submitting to God's will for guidance on a choice; but even then, according to some scholars, divination (*tafa'ul*) or seeking an insight into the future was strongly condemned, since knowledge of the future was an exclusive privilege of God's. But, as Serpil Bağcı and Massumeh Farhad note, at least by the fifteenth century "the line between consulting the Koran for divine guidance and making a choice (*istikhāra*) or for an augury (*tafa'ul*) were blurred at best".[43] Published *falname*s (some of which employed an elaborate system of choosing a prophet and then having an augury according to this choice) often seem

40 See Fahd, *La divination arabe*, 196–204; E. Savage-Smith and M. B. Smith, "Islamic Geomancy and a Thirteenth-Century Divinatory Device: Another Look", in E. Savage-Smith (ed.), *Magic and Divination in Early Islam* (Aldershot 2004), 211–276; M. Melvin-Koushki, "Persianate Geomancy from Tusi to the Millenium: A Preliminary Survey", in N. El-Bizri and E. Orthmann (eds), *Occult Sciences in Premodern Islamic Culture* (Beirut 2018), 151–199.

41 M. Mavroudi, "Islamic Divination in the Context of Its 'Eastern' and 'Western' Counterparts", in M. Farhad and S. Bağcı (eds), *Falnama: The Book of Omens* (Washington 2009), 222–229 at 225.

42 Mavroudi, "Islamic Divination", 229.

43 S. Bağcı and M. Farhad, "The Art of Bibliomancy", in Farhad and Bağcı (eds), *Falnama*, 20–25, at 20.

to be oriented to divination rather than guidance.[44] Geomancy functioned in a similar way, both because its initial set of forms was acquired through inspiration and because it was mostly used for augury and choices rather than complete prognostications.[45] On the other hand, bibliomancy through other texts, such as the poems of Hafiz or Rumi, though quite common does not seem to have had any theological basis at all. Instead, their function was based loosely on the cosmological concepts of microcosm and macrocosm: this is implied by the instructions for using *falname*s or divination manuals, where one can see a correspondence between letters, planets or astrological mansions, animals and plants, and religious figures.[46] Another interpretation underscored the relation of the pictures used for augury with the past, rather than the future, implying that prognostication would be based on historical analogies. In the preface of a *Falname* prepared for Ahmed I by the Grand Vizier-to-be Kalender Pasha (d. 1616), we read:[47]

> When in ancient times mankind first stepped into the expanse of the world and looked upon the situation of the world as an example, mystics and ecstatics who fully understand and comprehend the external form of the world have confirmed that the history of the past nations is a manual for people and that it is appropriate to learn a lesson in any and every affair from those who have preceded. It is especially right for mighty rulers... to look upon the tales of prophets and saints and the adventures of past rulers, to contemplate their beginnings and ends, and to comprehend the final end of their affairs from them. To that end they have filled pages with indications and allusions to the physical shapes of events that happened to past rulers... so that, by means of augury from whichever of those pages is opened, the seeker of the augury can apply to his own situation whatever

44 See e.g. Ö. Şenödeyici, "Tradition of Fortune Telling with the Name of the Prophet and Three Written Works about it", *Gazi Türkiyat*, 14 (2014), 67–104; Ö. Şenödeyici and H. S. Kosik, "En muteber kaynaktan gaybı öğrenmek: bir Kuran falı manzumesi", *Littera Turca. Journal of Turkish Language and Literature*, 1:1 (2015), 71–96; H. S. Kosik, "Müellifi bilinmeyen manzum bir Kur'ân falı", *Littera Turca. Journal of Turkish Language and Literature*, 3:4 (2017), 127-141; Schmidt, "The Occult Sciences", 237–240.

45 See Schmidt, "The Occult Sciences", 240-244 for a series of manuscripts dated up to the early 1900s.

46 See Bağcı and Farhad, "The Art of Bibliomancy".

47 Farhad and Bağcı (eds), *Falnama*, 296 and cf. S. Bağcı, "The Falnama of Ahmad I (TSM H.1703)", in ibid., 75. This careful phrasing, though, might be attributed to the Sultan's hostile attitude to pictorial representation (ibid.).

> is depicted of the history of the prophets and rulers on that page, make an analogy from those situations with his own desire, and act accordingly. If you wish power and glory to increase for you, let your gaze always be upon past events.

Instances of visionary foresight abound in Ottoman sources. In the words of Akhisari Isa, "the saints (*evliya*) have access to the hidden world (*gayb*) through dreams and inspirations (*rüya ve ilham*)".[48] But other ways were also possible: a special category of *falname*s, the *ihtilâc-nâme*s, interpreted involuntary movements of the parts of one's body as signs for the future.[49] Mustafa Ali relates that "according to the experience of the wise, whenever a Sultan is enthroned they wait diligently and they take an omen, good or bad (*tefe'ül ü tatayyur kılurlar*), from the first words that come out of his mouth. They have found with many ways that such words emerge truly wise (*li-hikmet idüğini*)." In the example he cites, Murad III's first words after his inauguration were "I am hungry", and indeed there was great dearth and scarcity of provisions during his reign.[50]

A rare and fascinating example of visionary knowledge of future events is the so-called *Papasnâme* ("The priest's book"), written by Derviş Mehmed, a Christian priest turned Muslim. Its manuscripts are all dated after 1651,[51] but some internal evidence suggests that its initial version must have been compiled at the end of the sixteenth century.[52] The author relates how he was wondering about the grim prospects of the Ottoman dynasty, when a sheikh, named Abdurrahman, explained that "angels, prophets and saints can have knowledge of the hidden future" (*gayb olacağın bilseler*), because God has told them with various visions (*vâkı'a*, *düş*). The reality of such visions depends on the dreamer; a vision does not make the saint but the saint gets (prophetic)

48 *Şeyh İsa menâkıbnâmesi*, ed. Muslu and Küçük, 194.

49 S. Özyaşamış Şakar, "Bir Türk fal kitabı: ihtilâc-nâme", *Türk Kültürü İncelemeleri Dergisi*, 22 (2010), 213–228.

50 *Gelibolulu Mustafa Âlî ve* Künhü'l-ahbâr*'ında*, ed. Çerçi, II: 240.

51 See T. Krstić, *Contested conversions to Islam. Narratives of religious change in the early modern Ottoman Empire* (Stanford 2011), 116–118. Here I use the MSS of Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek MS Mixt 689 (1651) and Istanbul, Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi, Saliha Hatun 112/2 (1685/6). The text is to be published by Günhan Börekçi and Tijana Krstić; I wish to thank them both for their permission and help. A very short synopsis in Sariyannis, *Ottoman Political Thought*, 177–179.

52 On this dating, see Sariyannis, *Ottoman Political Thought*, 177fn60.

visions (*düş evliya etmez amma evliya düş uyur*). After a long discussion on the need to distinguish between rightly-guided and ignorant mystics (*ulema* is the word used), the sheikh brings as an example the dream of Osman Gazi and claims that he also had such knowledge granted by God (*Hakk... bana bildürmişdür*). He explains at length the divine plan for humanity and urges the author to ritually prepare, *abdest* and all, so that he may see the signs (*bu 'alâmetleri sana gösterem*). Indeed, after preparing himself, the author stands near the sheikh and the vision begins:

> I prayed and went near the sheikh; he held my right hand with his left hand and said to me: "close your eyes". I closed my eyes and then he said: "Open your eyes". I opened my eyes and found ourselves at the small wall at the west of Ayasofya, opposite the gate of the palace. I saw a great tumult coming from the gate and became afraid; when I gathered my mind I saw Sultan Mehmed coming out of the gate.[53]

All the future seventy sultans of the Ottoman dynasty up to the End of Days appear in succession with various symbolic forms (ships, lions etc.), which the sheikh interprets to the author. Thus, the sultans to come (bearing the already used Ottoman royal names but also other Muslim names, such as Hasan or Edhem) are prophesied to take not only the cities and territories of traditional enemies (Moscow, Vienna or Rome) but also Spain, Germany, France, England, China and the Americas. Setbacks are also predicted, due either to infidel rebellions or to corrupt or tyrannical sultans, but eventually the whole world is to succumb to the warriors of faith. Along with the story of conquests and battles, there are also reforms and measures of interior policy: a massacre of the Jews of Istanbul (they are to return some generations later), prohibitions of wine, drugs or idle life, obligatory freeing of slaves after seven years of service and so on.

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A second category of ways through which to foresee the future was again related with the supernatural, but in a more rational manner—or, in Edgar W. Francis' words, using "mechanical rather than spiritual methods" (but still in a

53 SK, Saliha Hatun 112/2, fol. 10a-b.

spiritual vision of the world).[54] Largely due to the immensely influential figure of Abdürrahman al-Bistami (d. 1454),[55] the beginning of the Ottoman imperial age coincided with the great blooming of the "science of letters", meaning a set of ideas and concepts ascribing divine meaning to the letters of the Arabic alphabet and inventing techniques of using them as symbols and markers of the divine plans and works. With deep roots in Islamic theology (but also in the Jabirean alchemy, which claimed that every metal has a certain proportion of qualities, reflected in the letters of its Arabic name),[56] this theory received its first full exposition in Ibn Arabi's works. Since the Qur'an was considered (universally after the end of the ninth-century debate with the Mu'tazilites) as *written* in the heavens (*umm al-kitab*), i.e. as an uncreated property (not just the word) of God, co-eternal with Him, each letter of each *sura* would be part of this property, and thus incorporated in the hierarchies and correspondences of heaven and earth. As philosophical systems based on the emanation of intelligence through angels (al-Farabi, Ibn Sina, al-Suhrawardi) had already emerged, angels were identified with letters (for Ibn Arabi) and with *sura*s of the Qur'an (al-Buni).[57] Abu l-Abbas Ahmad b. Ali l-Buni (d. 1225?), with the *Corpus Bunianum*[58] ascribed to his name, and first and foremost with "The great sun of knowledge" (*Shams al-ma'arif al-kubrā*), was the main exponent of the lettrist interpretation:

54 E. W. Francis, "Magic and Divination in the Medieval Islamic Middle East", *History Compass*, 9:8 (2011), 622–633 at 624 (citing Fahd, *La divination arabe*, 524–526, who does not use these terms).

55 D. Grill, «Esotérisme contre hérésie: 'Abd al-Rahmân al-Bistâmî, un représentant de la science des lettres à Bursa dans la première moitié du XVe siècle», in G. Veinstein (ed.), *Syncrétismes et hérésies dans l'Orient seldjoukide et ottoman (XIVe-XVIIIe siècle). Actes du Colloque du Collège de France, octobre 2001* (Paris – Louvain 2005), 183–195; C. H. Fleischer, "Ancient Wisdom and New Sciences: Prophecies at the Ottoman Court in the Fifteenth and Early Sixteenth Centuries", in Farhad and Bağcı (eds), *Falnama*, 231–244; J.-Ch. Coulon, *La magie en terre d'Islam au Moyen Âge* (Paris 2017), 229–232; Idem, "Building al-Buni's Legend: The Figure of al-Buni through Abd al-Rahman al-Bistami's *Shams al-afaq*", *Journal of Sufi Studies*, 5:1 (2016), 1–26.

56 Coulon, *La magie en terre d'Islam*, 113–119; P. Lory, *Alchimie et mystique en terre d'Islam* (Paris 1989), 130-150.

57 P. Lory, *La science des lettres en Islam* (Paris 2017), 30–31.

58 On this corpus see Coulon, *La magie en terre d'Islam*, 219–229; N. Gardiner, "Esotericist Reading Communities and the Early Circulation of the Sufi Occultist Ahmad al-Buni's Works", *Arabica*, 64 (2017), 405–441.

> Know that the secrets of God and the objects of His science... the realities of the upper (*al-ulwiyyat*), the lower (*al-sufliyyat*) and the intermediary angelic worlds (*al-malakutiyyat*) are of two categories: numbers and letters... The numbers, being the realities of the upper world, correspond to the spiritual entities (*al-ruhaniyyat*), whereas the letters show the material and intermediate realities.

For al-Buni, the spirit of the letter corresponds to the world of archetypal images (*'alam al-jabarut*), the pronounced letter to the world of subtle entities (*'alam al-malakut*), and the written letter to the world of dense bodies (matter).[59] Al-Buni's theory of magic, based on the use of magical squares (*vafk*) and the correspondences between letters, numbers, and elements of nature exerted tremendous influence in the Islamicate world for the next three or four centuries. Popularized by al-Bistami, the *Corpus Bunianum* and the lettrist interpretations of the world had become a very popular way of predicting the future by the early sixteenth century. The influence of Hurufism in Ottoman culture, sectarian as it may be, must have enhanced these tendencies.[60] Techniques such as talismanic were developed in order to use this knowledge to influence the future. 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 an entire 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.[61] References to prognostications based on letters and numbers abound in Ottoman literature:[62]

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59 Lory, *La science des lettres*, 42-43.

60 S. Karahüseyin, "Bektaşîlik geleneğine Hurufî bir dokunuş: Nesîmî örneği", *IV. Türkiye Lisansüstü Çalışmaları Kongresi – Bildiriler Kitabı IV* (Istanbul 2015), 233–252; Ö. Şenodeyici and A. Akdağ, "Hurufilikte ebced hesabının kullanımına dair bir risale", *Mediterranean Journal of Humanities*, IV:2 (2014), 227–237.

61 A. T. Şen, "Practicing Astral Magic in Sixteenth-Century Ottoman Istanbul: A Treatise on Talismans Attributed to Ibn Kemāl (d. 1534)", *Magic, Ritual, and Witchcraft*, 12:1 (2017), 66-88.

62 Ö. Şenödeyici, "Ehl-i Beyt'in gizemli mirası cifir ve Türkçe cifir metinlerinden örnekler", *Türk Kültürü ve Hacı Bektaş Veli Araştırma Dergisi*, 87 (2018), 219-236, with an interesting collection of samples of Ottoman lettrist literature. Another rich collection of *cifr* literature can be found in Kâtip Çelebi's bibliographical encyclopedia: Kâtib Çelebi, *Keşf-el-zunun*, eds Ş. Yaltkaya and K. R. Bilge, 2 vols (n.l. [Istanbul] 1943; repr. Ankara 2014), 591–611

prognosticating the outcome of military campaigns or internal strife on the basis of not only the Quran but also poems, and all the more so Ottoman ones, was routine in the early sixteenth century,[63] and the method of predicting the outcome of a battle by subsequently subtracting numbers from the names of the combatants was already mentioned in an early-fifteenth-century treatise on arithmetic, with an interesting reference to ancient tradition:[64]

> It is said that, when confronting an enemy, Alexander the Great calculated [thus] the names of himself and of his enemy; if his enemy was found to be prevailing, he would choose from among his soldiers someone whose name would prevail [over his opponent's] and make him chief of his troops. Thus he could win the battle.

A rich collection of *cifr* (i.e. lettrist) literature is to be found in the library of the eighteenth-century scholar Veliyüddin Carullah Efendi (d. 1738).[65] A complex system of techniques was used to produce numbers out of words and letters out of numbers, in order to associate them with natural elements and psychological qualities.[66] Such divinatory or foretelling practices were not necessarily based on elaborate hierarchies and rules: the *melhame* genre, with several specimens up to at least the mid-seventeenth century, consisted of abstract predictions on natural phenomena as well as on political events; these predictions were based on the days a month started, comets, eclipses and other events. Authors seldom cared to interpret these interrelations, pointing to the authority of ancient wisdom; when they did offer some interpretation,

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and 650–662; Kâtip Çelebi, *Keşfü'z-zunûn*, trans. R. Balcı (Istanbul 2007–2009), 498–514 and 543–554.

63 Şen, "Practicing Astral Magic", 68.

64 Ş. Kalafat, "Anadolu (Osmanlı) sahasında yazılmış en eski tarihli Türkçe matematik risâlesi: Mahmūd bin Kādī-i Manyās'ın *A'cebü'l-'üccāb*'ı –Hesap bölümü–", *Turkish Studies: International Periodical for the Languages, Literature and History of Turkish or Turkic*, 12:30 (2017), 243–298 at 256 and 268.

65 F. Usluer, "Cârullah Efendi'nin cifir ve tıp ilimlerine dair kitapları", in B. Açıl (ed.), *Osmanlı Kitap Kültürü:* Cârullah Efendi Kütüphanesi *ve Derkenar Notları* (Ankara 2015), 297–312.

66 See Fahd, *La divination arabe*, 219-245; *EI*^{2}, "Djafr" (T. Fahd) and "Ḥurūf ('Ilm al-)" (T. Fahd); Coulon, *La magie en terre d'Islam*, 301, 304–305 (s.v. "bast"); for a list of Hurufi terms and methods see e.g. Karahüseyin, "Bektaşîlik geleneğine Hurufî bir dokunuş", 236–238.

it would be an association of days and months with planets and stars, as well as their numerical values.[67]

Apart from future events, the letters making up one's name defined his or her character, just as with one's horoscope, in the same way they defined the properties of minerals in Jabirean alchemy. A striking Ottoman example is Mustafa Ali's attempt to explain Murad III's refusal to join the imperial campaigns in person and more generally to travel, as his only journey was from Manisa to Istanbul for his inauguration:[68]

> According to the present author's opinion, the Sultan's personal inclination toward tranquility[69] was inevitable, and that is why there was no chance of his going to campaign: because I analyzed the name "Murad" and found that the letters *mim* and *elif* pertain to fire, while *ra* and *dal* to water. There is no letter of the air, so as to cause motion and movement. And such [a name] necessitates the desire for moving toward the earth element. Two fire and one water letter indicate sudden outbursts of anger, and two water letters indicate amazement and capricious change: just as water and fire dislike each other, likewise the late Sultan's behavior was always changing.

A similar description of Ahmed I's character based on the letters of his name can be found in a letter to the sultan by Mahmud Hüdayî (d. 1628).[70]

The use of lettrist methods to make long-term prognostications had begun much earlier in Shi'ite contexts where tradition had the Prophet revealing future of Muslim rulers to Ali. Ali allegedly wrote these revelations in symbols on a camel's skin (*cifr* in Arabic).[71] Al-Bistami expanded on this subject, and his prognostications were popularized in the late-fifteenth century *Dürr-i meknûn*, attributed as we saw to Yazıcıoğlu Ahmed Bican. The relevant chapter, drawing

67 See extensive samples in F. Turan, "Halk Osmanlıcası I. Melhameler ve bir on yedinci yüzyıl melhamesi", *Bir: Türk Dünyasi Incelemeleri Dergisi*, 9–10 (1998), 685–709; R. Demir, "Melhameler ve bir onyedinci yüzyıl Osmanlı âlim ve edîbi Cevrî Çelebi'nin *Melhame*'si", in G. Eren, K. Çiçek and C. Oğuz (eds), *Osmanlı* v. 8: *Bilim* (Ankara 1999), 431–441.

68 *Gelibolulu Mustafa Âlî ve* Künhü'l-ahbâr*'ında*, ed. Çerçi, II:239–240.

69 *sükûn*. The editor of the text prefers the reading *sükût*, "silence, reticence".

70 M. S. Güven, "Azîz Mahmûd Hüdâyî'nin metkupları üzerine bir değerlendirme", *KSÜ İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi*, 19 (2012), 105–142 at 130; Idem, "Çeşitli yönleriyle Azîz Mahmûd Hüdâyî'nin mektupları", annex p. 139.

71 *EI*^{2}, "Djafr" (T. Fahd); Şenödeyici, "Ehl-i Beyt'in gizemli mirası", 225–226.

explicitly from al-Bistami's work (but also the Epistles of the Brethren of Purity), describes in some detail both the method (a combination of numerical and alphabetical transformations of the verses producing names of rulers and the duration of their rule) and its results, with a strong eschatological flavor.[72]

The most complete example of a lettrist foretelling of future history is *Rumûz-ı künûz* ("Treasures of ciphers"), composed in 1557 by İlyas b. İsa Saruhani (d. 1559).[73] Ibn Isa was the son of the Bayrami sheikh Akhisari Mecdüddin Isa, whom we also saw above. Akhisari Isa was himself a master of the science of letters; he had learnt it from a certain Baba Hamdi in Baghdad.[74] His biography, written by his son İlyas Saruhani, details two cases predicting future sultans: each verse of the first *sura* of the Quran corresponds to one or more rulers, and the world will not end until sultans (of the Ottoman line) corresponding to the letters of the remaining verses reign.[75]

İlyas b. İsa Saruhani was an accomplished lettrist scholar himself; according to a short biography annexed to the one he wrote for his father, "at his times, he had no peer in the science of letters (*ilm-i cifr*) and of magic squares".[76] His *Rumûz-ı künûz* draws on the logic and results of his father's predictions but in a much more detailed way, as it contains a series of predictions concerning sultans, viziers, other high officials, judges and sheikhs, as well as events to come

72 *Dürr-i meknûn*, ed. Kaptein, 294–308 and 546–556. Cf. Grenier, "Reassessing the Authorship", 201.

73 A. Özgül, "İlyas b. Îsâ-yı Saruhânî'nin 'Rumûzü'l-künûz' adlı eserin transkripsiyonu ve değerlendirilmesi", unpublished MA thesis, Kırıkkale University, 2004; cf. I. Tamdoğan-Abel, "Le futur dans le *Rumuz-i kunuz* de Mejdeddin Ibn Isa: une utopie, une prophétie, un livre à mystères", in N. Clayer, A. Popovic and T. Zarcone (eds), *Melâmis – Bayrâmis: Etudes sur trois mouvements mystiques musulmans* (Istanbul 1998), 145-152; Sariyannis, *Ottoman Political Thought*, 158–159 (to the ten MSS cited in Özgül, "İlyas b. Îsâ-yı Saruhânî'nin 'Rumûzü'l-künûz'", 25–26, one can add at least three more from European libraries: Tamdoğan-Abel, "Le futur dans le *Rumuz-i kunuz*", 145 fn. 3). The date is given at the beginning and end of the manuscripts (cf. Özgül, "İlyas b. Îsâ-yı Saruhânî'nin 'Rumûzü'l-künûz'", 72: "the present sultan Selim [II]").

74 *Şeyh İsa menâkıbnâmesi*, ed. Muslu and Küçük, 236, 238 (on Baba Hamdi). In ibid., 236 fn. there is an interesting marginal note explaining with remarkable clarity the function of lettrist analysis.

75 Ibid., 191–193 and 197–198.

76 Ibid., 260.

until the Hijri year 3000.[77] The names of the sultans are predicted following the method of Saruhani's father, i.e. according to the letters of the words in the different verses of the first Quranic *sura*. Furthermore, letters are associated to the four elements and to their numerical values to produce qualities and events of the sultans to come. The author does not always explain his method (not after showing letters of the names in the words of the *sura*); sometimes he is not certain of having a safe result:

> Afterwards, there will be a great sultan. *Dal* will be the final letter of his name; his viziers or children will be one or two; or the final letters of his name will be *nun* and *elif*, for instance Osman, Nu'man, Orhan, Suleyman, Imran.[78]

The names of other figures, such as viziers, are based not on Quranic verses but on other quotations, for instance the mysterious praise of Ali *kerremallahü veche*, or that of imam Ca'fer *radıyallahu 'anh*.[79] At times Saruhani is at pains to explain his method:

> This illustrious knowledge is contained in these quotations, and it was discovered from them... Every great city in land and sea, in the seven climates, has one of the letters pertaining to earth; if one subtracts two each time [successively] from the number of this letter, the result will show the life-span of the city's ruler. If a letter of fire is redundant in a ruler's chart (*cedvel*), the ruler will be wrathful; if a letter of earth, he will be mean; if a letter of air, he will be constantly on the move...
>
> When the author of this book had just begun writing it, he went to Istanbul; the agha of the janissaries denied this truth... His name was Ferhad; now "Ferhad" has five letters and, according to the words of sheikh Muhammed Endülüsî, the letters *fa*, *alif*, *ha* are letters of fire, whereas *dal* and *ra* are letters of earth. The number of the letters of fire is 86; if we subtract nine successively, the remainder is five, which is letter *ha*...[80]

Interestingly, the method of subtracting the required multiple of a number from the numerical value of a name is referred to as Saruhani's invention (or,

77 This includes a description of half-human tribes of the far Eastern lands: Özgül, "İlyas b. Îsâ-yı Saruhânî'nin 'Rumûzü'l-künûz'", 75–76.

78 Ibid., 53.

79 Ibid., 54, 57. Both personalities were considered authors of pivotal treatises in the lettrist tradition: Şenödeyici, "Ehl-i Beyt'in gizemli mirası".

80 Özgül, "İlyas b. Îsâ-yı Saruhânî'nin 'Rumûzü'l-künûz'", 56–57.

at least, he is credited with having explained it) in an early nineteenth-century manual associating names with stars, which then are used to establish omens (of course it is attested much earlier)[81]; the same method was used in some oneiromancy texts, combining dreams, numbers and letters.[82] In Saruhani's text, the details on each person's activity are not justified; presumably Saruhani inserted his own opinions and advice under the authority of the science of letters, which he explained only as far as it concerns names.[83] At times he refers to the mythical *cifr*, the camel's skin where Ali wrote his revelations. Saruhani's text was so popular that at least some manuscripts (the first dated copy comes from 1655) contain "predictions" that had already been fulfilled, in order to strengthen the prophetic power of the author. A large section "predicts" the introduction of coffee and tobacco and the repercussions that ensued, as well as the appearance of Kadızade Mehmed, the famous revivalist preacher:

> In the year 940 of the Hijra there will appear a black water named coffee; it will be considered alternatively sinful or not, until it will be deemed lawful with a *fetva* in the year 980. After the year 1000 there will also appear a smoke (*bir duhan*); the people of the world will become addicted; a Sultan will prohibit it and execute lots of people, but as it will prove impossible to extinguish it a mufti will declare it lawful after the year 1060 [1652]... A preacher by the name of Kadızade will make the Sultan prohibit [such luxuries]; however this prohibition will not be respected...[84]

As Işık Tamdoğan has remarked, the space of the future in this work does not differ from the space of the present: all battles and wars are essentially the

81 E.g. in Manyasoğlu's early fifteenth-century encyclopaedia: Kalafat, "Anadolu (Osmanlı) sahasında yazılmış", 268.

82 Schmidt, "The Occult Sciences", 236, 246; Turan, "Eski bir Türkçe tabirnâmede *ebced* hesabı"; A. Esen, "An Ottoman Miscellany Compiled in the Eighteenth Century (Textual Analysis, Transcription and Comparative Text)", unpublished MA thesis, Boğaziçi University, 2019, 267–268 (f. 75a).

83 A detailed study might show that Saruhani copies in fact some of al-Bistami's predictions; cf. the short passage from an Ottoman Turkish translation of Bistami in Şenödeyici, "Ehl-i Beyt'in gizemli mirası", 226.

84 Özgül, "İlyas b. Îsâ-yı Saruhânî'nin 'Rumûzü'l-künûz'", 74; see also ibid., 81 (on Kadızade's feud with the Sufi fraternities).

same, against the same opponents and in the same terrain as in the sixteenth century.[85]

The fictional character of such texts bears a lot of similarities with other "alternative histories", such as the famous popular "history" of Mahmud Pasha Angelović, which like Saruhani's or Derviş Mehmed's texts was largely copied and read in the seventeenth century.[86] We can thus deduce that "prophetic" literature belongs as well to a vernacular tendency in Ottoman letters, which tended to be more and more visible after the mid-seventeenth century;[87] however, the success of occult methods of predicting the future in the highest court circles (Rammal Haydar foretelling universal dominion through geomancy in Suleyman's times, Sheikh Şücâ explaining Murad III's dreams),[88] as well as the still unexplored state of occultist studies, leave wide open the possibility of the existence of similar texts written in a higher register. In general, it seems that such predictions, lettrist or visionary, were mostly practiced by authors with strong ties to Sufism. One of the latest examples I am aware of is the diary Niyazi-i Mısrî (d. 1694) kept while in exile in Lemnos: among passionate attacks against the Ottoman sultans and entries which reveal an almost paranoid fear of persecution, Niyazi is constantly emerged in calculations of letters and numbers in order to make various prognostications. Nevertheless, most of his calculations (based on the names of God or on Quranic and other quotations) refer to the number of days passed since his

85 Tamdoğan-Abel, "Le futur dans le *Rumuz-i kunuz*", pp. 147.

86 Th. Stavridis, *The Sultan of Vezirs. The Life and Times of the Ottoman Grand Vezir Mahmud Pasha Angelović (1453–1474)* (Leiden 2001), 356–396; H. Reindl-Kiel, "Fromme Helden, Wunder, Träume: Populäre Geschichtsauffassung im Osmanischen Reich des 18. und frühen 19. Jahrhunderts", *Journal for Turkish Studies*, 26:II (2002) [Essays in Honour of Barbara Flemming, II], 175–181; Eadem, "The Tragedy of Power: The Fate of Grand Vezirs According to the *Menakıbname-i Mahmud Paşa-i Veli*", *Turcica*, 35 (2003), 247–256.

87 See N. Hanna, "Literacy and the 'Great Divide' in the Islamic World, 1300–1800", *Journal of Global History*, 2 (2007), 175-193; Eadem, "Literacy among Artisans and Tradesmen in Ottoman Cairo", in Ch. Woodhead (ed.), *The Ottoman World* (London 2012), 319–331; D. Sajdi, *The Barber of Damascus: Nouveau Literacy in the Eighteenth-Century Ottoman Levant* (Stanford 2013); M. Kökrek, "Müstensih Yeniçeriler", *Türk Dünyası Tarih-Kültür Dergisi*, 349 (2016), 22–24.

88 Felek, *Kitâbü'l-menâmât*.

imprisonment, the birth of his son and so forth.[89] It is worth noting that Niyazi claims to have acquired his lettrist skills through revelation rather than study (he also records visions and revelations).[90] When he did attempt to use lettrist methods to justify major theological claims (namely, that Hasan and Husayn were actually the last prophets), Niyazi did not use the term *cifr* (term associated with the science of letters, which he had been using earlier in his diary) but talked of the "knowledge of divine names" instead.[91]

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What is common to the practices and techniques described so far is their straight connection with the supernatural: visionary or dream prognostications are the result of direct communication with the *ghayb*, presumably through divine grace or angelic intervention, whereas lettrist science presupposes a divine plan for everybody, in which Arabic letters are the signs corresponding to an unseen structure of the world (and as al-Buni had written, "the secret of letters... can be reached only through vision and with the aid of a divine intervention").[92] Another common feature of these approaches was the fact that their practice was usually associated with Sufi circles. Indeed, although a cursory reading of copybooks (*mecmua*s) would show that such beliefs must have been common to a wide range of social and cultural groups throughout the Ottoman times,[93] those who claimed authority in interpreting visions and other signs were mostly prominent Bayrami (like Saruhani İsa and his son), Halveti (like Hüdayî or Niyazi) or other fraternities' sheikhs. A nice and early example of this struggle on privileged mediation to knowledge and the supernatural is the letter of an anonymous sheikh to Bayezid I (r. 1481–1512), discovered by Ahmet Tunç Şen, in which the sheikh attempts to discourage the sultan from studying astrology, at least not until he attains the spiritual

89 Almost every two or three pages of Niyazi's diary contain such a calculation; see Niyazî, *Niyazî-i Mısrî'nin hatıraları*, ed. H. Çeçen (Istanbul 2006) and cf. D. Terzioğlu, "Man in the Image of God in the Image of Times: Sufi Self-Narratives and the Diary of Niyāzī-ı Mıṣrī (1618-94)", *Studia Islamica*, 94 (2002), 139–165.

90 Terzioğlu, "Man in the Image of God", 156–157; *Niyazî-i Mısrî'nin hatıraları*, ed. Çeçen, 63-64.

91 Terzioğlu, "Sufi and Dissident", 437–438.

92 Quoted in *EI*^{2}, "Ḥurūf ('Ilm al-)" (T. Fahd).

93 See Schmidt, "The Occult Sciences".

stage needed at the hands of the sheikh's disciple.[94] It seems that such circles were claiming enhanced access to the supernatural, partly as a result of the growing strength and range of Sufi networks: with each fraternity or even each particular sheikh struggling to demonstrate a special knowledge of the Hereafter, miraculous acts only too naturally multiplied in their life stories, making the world more enchanted than ever, to use Derin Terzioğlu's words.[95] Knowledge of the future was the strongest among these acts.

There was yet another way to predict the future, and this was to have recourse to a system of interdependencies which left little room for supernatural intervention. Visionary practices used spiritual methods to serve a spiritual vision of the world; the lettrist approach used mechanical methods to serve the same vision; a mechanical vision of the universe was yet to come.[96] But if lettrist interpretations of the world had strong overtones of divine interference (since the value of Arabic letters was founded on the quality of the Quran as a divine property), astrological theories linked the heavenly bodies with human lives in a deterministic way that often defied the understanding of the world by the ulema and Sufi scholars. Still, it was such common wisdom that even the latter were accepting this fact, although they usually denied human ability to comprehend these links. For the erudite circles at least it was a self-evident fact that there was a connection between the macrocosm, the universe with its heavenly bodies and relations thereof, with the microcosm, the realms of the natural world on earth and the human body, and astrological interpretations of history (and all the more, of sacred history) were current already in the ninth or tenth centuries.[97] The influence of the celestial movements on earthly affairs was a well-entrenched belief in the Ptolemaic tradition of astronomy, and a commonplace in every geographical account. We saw above how Şükrullah Efendi linked human history with the heavenly bodies, with each thousand-

94 A. T. Şen, "Reading the Stars at the Ottoman Court: Bāyezīd II (r. 886/1481–918/1512) and his Celestial Interests", *Arabica*, 64 (2017), 557-608 at 597-598. On the enmity of several Sufis towards astrologers see also Idem, "Astrology in the Service of the Empire: Knowledge, Prognostication, and Politics at the Ottoman Court, 1450s–1550s", unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Chicago, 2016, 98–102.

95 Terzioğlu, "Man in the Image of God", 165.

96 Cf. M. Sariyannis, "'Temporal Modernization' in the Ottoman pre-Tanzimat Context", *Etudes Balkaniques*, 53 (2017), 230–262 at 251–252.

97 See E. S. Kennedy et al., "Al-Battānī's Astrological History of the Prophet and the Early Caliphate", *Suhayl*, 9 (2009–2010), 13–148.

year epoch governed by a particular planet; he also explained such influences in a neo-Platonic vision, which was quite fashionable in the Islamic world:

> Know that God the most High created the stars from light. He created them from the light of divinity, which influences the minds and souls, and He gave each star a peculiar feature... It is said that each of these seven planets... has an intelligence and a soul, and each one directs and governs a climate; each one makes its climate to perpetuate and be empowered. According to the influence of the house of each planet, whenever this planet becomes weak, so become the inhabitants of this climate.[98]

This series of emanations could explain every trait and feature of the realms of the natural world. Again in Şükrullah's words, on God's order the intellect was born; from the intellect the spirit (*nefs*); from the spirit, the heavenly spheres and the stars; from the spheres, the natures (hot, humid etc.) and the matter; from the natures, the elements and principles (*rükn*). Struggling to dominate one another, the four elements under the influence of the spheres resulted in the creation of the seven main metals (gold, silver, copper, iron, tin, lead, and mercury). When the natures of these metals were found to be equipoise, the power of vegetative growth emerged and the realm of the flora was born. Then, as soon as the natures of trees and flowers and their respective power grew, the vegetative power found its perfection and created vegetables such as the mandrake or the *Waqwaq* tree; in fact, the animal power emerged and the four humours were created. At this moment, the road was open for the creation of the three realms of nature, all combined in the animal kingdom: the bones in the degree of metals, the nerves and meat in the degree of plants, and the soul and (animal) movement in the degree of animal power. The completion of these animals, the last of which was the monkey, was man, where another power, the human power and the speech were also born.[99]

Thus, 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. A treatise on talismans, composed

98 *Behcetü't-tevârîh*, ed. Almaz, 78. For another reference to the dependence of the characteristics of the people in each climate on the respective stars and planets, see ibid., 109.

99 Ibid., 83–85.

probably by the *şeyhülislam* Kemalpaşazade (also known as Ibn Kemal, d. 1534), describes the world as a system of interrelated celestial and terrestrial forces, in an extent incomprehensible to man, where the impact of heavenly bodies on the sublunary world is beyond doubt; although the author does not speak straightforwardly of foretelling the future, he insists on the possibility of controlling it through the production of talismans, carefully designed on the basis of astrological data, which could influence a child's fate.[100] Such ideas seem to have gained weight in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (in fact bringing back theories prevailing in the Islamic world up to the early thirteenth century),[101] in tandem with European Renaissance occultism that also had 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-havāss*) 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. In his *Miftah al-saada*, Mevlana Taşköprüzade writes: "Know that, a man may be indulged to prayer, reciting the holy books and God's names, and thus direct himself to God and stay away from everything that could distract him from thinking God... This way, he may attain light and [miraculous] works according to his disposition. Whoever asks God for help and gets it through the properties of prayers may seem as practicing magic".
>
> 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

100 Şen, "Practicing Astral Magic", 75–78.

101 See e.g. M. Melvin-Koushki, "Powers of One: The Mathematicalization of the Occult Sciences in the High Persianate Tradition", *Intellectual History of the Islamicate World*, 5:1 (2017), 127–199; L. Saif, "From *Ġāyat al-ḥakīm* to *Šams al-maʿārif wa laṭā'if al-ʿawārif*: Ways of Knowing and Paths of Power", *Arabica*, 64 (2017), 297–345; H. Obuchi, "Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī and Occult Science as Philosophy: An Aspect of the Philosophical Theology of Islam at the Beginning of the Thirteenth Century", *Annals of Japan Association for Middle East Studies*, 34 (2018), 1–33.

> 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.[102]

It is significant to note that Kâtib Çelebi speaks of geomancy in the same terms, although, as discussed, this science was based on an initial state of revelatory inspiration (when the geomancer casts his patterns): he stresses the similarities and analogies of the forms with the zodiac signs, with the cautionary remark that their interpretation is up to a degree hypothetical and inaccurate.[103] Similarly, when describing at length the *za'irja* astrological device he emphasizes its mathematical nature.[104]

The situation was somehow different as far as it concerned astrology and, more specifically, the idea that one's horoscope might predestinate one's life. The idea that an astrologer could make safe predictions of the future by studying the movements of the stars had always been highly debatable, since it contradicted the theological principle of man's free will. Refuted vehemently by al-Hatîb al-Bağdadî in the eleventh century on the grounds of its uncertainty and even its being based on arbitrary conventions (such as the division of the Zodiac or the coordination of the mansions with the planets) rather than sound reason,[105] astrology was as often as not distinguished from both astronomy and theologically sound knowledge. The debate on astrology had a long history, and the arguments from both sides bear significant similarities with the similar debate in Western Europe.[106] A popular encyclopedia composed by the poet

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102 *Keşf-el-zunun*, eds Yaltkaya and Bilge, I:725; *Keşfü'z-zunûn*, trans. Balcı, 601–602. Cf. Taşköprüzade, *Miftâh as-Sa'âdah wa misbâh as-siyâdah fi mawdu'ât al-ulûm, by Ahmad b. Mustafa (Tashkupri-zadah)*, eds K. K. Bakry and A. Abu'l-Nur (Cairo 1968), I, 365–366.

103 *Keşf-el-zunun*, eds Yaltkaya and Bilge, 912; *Keşfü'z-zunûn*, trans. Balcı, 740.

104 *Keşf-el-zunun*, eds Yaltkaya and Bilge, 948; *Keşfü'z-zunûn*, trans. Balcı, 764–765. On *za'irja* see *EI*^{2}, "Zā'irdja" (T. Fahd and A. Regourd); D. Link, "Scrambling T-R-U-T-H: Rotating Letters as a Material Form of Thought", in S. Zielinski and E. Fürlus (eds), *Variantology 4. On Deep Time Relations of Arts, Sciences and Technologies in the Arabic-Islamic World* (Cologne 2010), 215–266.

105 A. M. Heinen, *Islamic Cosmology. A Study of as-Suyûtî's* al-Hay'a as-sanîya fî l-hay'a as-sunnîya *With Critical Edition, Translation, and Commentary* (Beyrut 1982), 29–34.

106 Şen, "Astrology in the Service of the Empire", 79–103; cf. J.-P. Boudet, *Entre science et* nigromance*: astrologie, divination et magie dans l'Occident médiéval (XIIe-Xve siècle)* (Paris 2006), 68–74 and 205–239 (on European astrology).

Nev'i (d. 1599) summarizes the debate from the part of the opponents of astrology:

> ...those who believe that the order of the stars is completely independent and not subordinate to the Divine order are infidels... According to the usual practice it is possible that certain events cause other ones. Thus, it has been established through the senses that fire is the cause of blaze. But there is no evidence that stars are the causes of good fortune or are reasons for misfortune, neither on the basis of the senses, nor from rational evidence, nor from oral tradition... Just as they say that the heavenly bodies are a fifth element and do not consist of the four basic elements, then they established a nature for each star, such as cold and dry for Saturn, and hot and humid for Jupiter: this is a contradiction in itself.... So, they say that the burning of the stars in their own celestial sphere is because they approach the sun for one degree and one second. They say this has a bad influence, too. And this too is something attributed: it is not true, because in the place where the stars are located nothing is burning, so how could [all this] have an influence?...
>
> There are three reasons for the prohibition [of astrology by the religious law]. The first reason is this: In the soul of someone who ties his heart to the rules of the stars grows a veneration for the stars and he believes in the influence of the stars... Such a belief is contrary to the belief in one God and leads to the emergence of polytheism. The second reason is this: The above-mentioned science is pure ignorance... The reasons and conditions for this science are beyond the boundaries man can reach... There are 1029 fixed stars that are set up in the sky of the constellations. According to the astrologers each of them has its rules, just like the rules of the planets... To understand the above-mentioned numerous conditions is beyond the limited human power... When at a star's rise an astrologer takes an astrolabe in his hands and sets it well and right, and in the sweet moment when he thinks he set it right, the sun meanwhile has moved some thousand parasangs...
>
> The third [reason] is this: There is no use in knowledge of the occurrence of certain events in advance, because the Prophet said, "There is no use of warnings of what has already been destined".[107]

Nev'i seems to deny the stars' influence to the microcosm wholesale. The same outright rejection can be seen in Kâtib Çelebi's work:

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107 Nev'î, *"The Yield of the Disciplines and the Merits of the Texts": Nev'î Efendi's Encyclopaedıa Netâyic el-Fünûn*, ed. G. Procházka-Eisl and H. Çelik [*Texts on Popular Learning in Early Modern Ottoman Times*, vol. II] (Harvard 2015), 120–122.

> If one asks how is possible that some celestial bodies can be the cause of worldly events: a sagacious astrologer can infer some events before they happen from the position of the stars, their courses and their passing from sign to sign, just as the doctor can infer the imminent coming of an illness out of the pulse movements... It is possible that some events are the cause of some others, but nobody has ever heard any proof, either from his senses or from his mind, as to whether the stars can be the cause of happiness or misfortune. That there is no sensorial proof is self-evident, as most of the things predicted by the astrologers do not come true... As for the nonexistence of logical proofs, the causes shown by astrologers and their methods contradict each other: for instance, they claim that the heavenly bodies are not composed by the four elements, but are instead of a fifth natural quality; and then they talk of the coldness and dryness of Saturn, the heat and wetness of Jupiter, and so forth for the stars. From the point of view of the Holy Law, it is blameworthy and even prohibited.[108]

Still, these arguments never prevailed as the belief in the power of astrology continued to be almost self-evident. And indeed, astrological prognostication was an indispensable part of Ottoman science and played a significant role in politics ever since Bayezid II (r. 1481–1512) showed a keen interest in patronizing and maintaining astrologers in his court.[109] The office of the chief astrologer or *müneccimbaşı* was maintained in the palace up to the end of the Empire.[110] The connection of celestial bodies and movements to the microcosm and the fate of men and states could also have a theological explanation. Namely, this could occur through the identification of God's cosmic tablet and stylus

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108 *Keşf-el-zunun*, eds Yaltkaya and Bilge, II: 1930; *Keşfü'z-zunûn*, trans. Balcı, 1545. Cf. the much shorter section in Taşköprüzade's encyclopaedia: *Miftâh as-Sa'âdah*, eds Bakry and Abu'l-Nur, I, 337.

109 Şen, "Reading the Stars at the Ottoman Court". On the marked presence of occultist literature in Bayezid's library see now G. Necipoğlu, C. Kafadar and C. H. Fleischer (eds), *Treasures of Knowledge: An Inventory of the Ottoman Palace Library (1502/3–1503/4)*, 2 vols (Leiden 2019) and esp. the chapters by G. Burak ("The Section on Prayers, Invocations, Unique Qualities of the Qur'an, and Magic Squares in the Palace Library Inventory", I, 341-366), N. Gardiner ("Books on Occult Sciences", I, 735-765) and A. T. Şen and C. H. Fleischer ("Books on Astrology, Astronomical Tables, and Almanacs in the Library Inventory of Bayezid II", I, 767–822).

110 S. Aydüz, "Osmanlı Devleti'nde müneccimbaşılık müessesesi", *Belleten*, 70:257 (2006), 167–264; Idem, "Muwaqqit and the Munajjimbashi, Office of The", in I. Kalin, S. Ayduz and C. Dagli (eds), *The Oxford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy, Science and Technology in Islam* (Oxford 2014), II, 64–68.

with cosmological entities, including the sky or the area near the Zodiac.[111] Somehow inversely, the scientific basis of astrological prognostications is eminent when we read of infidels making true forecasts: for example, when the fifteenth century historian Yazıcızâde Ali and his seventeenth-century colleague Müneccimbaşı assert that the monks of a Greek monastery in Serres, near Salonica, had foreseen the rise of the House of Osman on the basis of their astrological observations.[112] As for the specific arguments against the principles of astrological influence, they were refuted in their turn by various scholars. Attempting to explain why a baby born in the seventh or the ninth month survives, while in the eight month dies, Sükrullah first mentions the opinion that each month the embryo is under the influence of a planet, and the eighth month is influenced by Saturn, which, its nature being dry and cold, brings misfortune. Then he argues that this opinion must be false, since in this case the embryo would be under Saturn's influence from the beginning and thus should never be formed in the womb. Şükrullah suggests instead that it is the number eight that is unfortunate.[113] Responding to a similar objection, namely the problem of twins with different fates, the scholar and Bayezid II's advisor Mü'eyyedzade Abdurrahman (d. 1516) argues that it is really the time of conception that matters (presumably different for each twin) and that even a slight change in the celestial degrees can produce radical change in the terrestrial world.[114] The great *şeyhülislam*s of the sixteenth century were rather benevolent toward the possibility of divination: Ibn Kemal/Kemalpaşazade, a protégé of Mü'eyyedzade's, accepts the possibility of knowledge of the *ghayb* provided one admits that such knowledge is conjectural and speculating;[115] as for Ebussuud, he denies the use of the Quran for bibliomancy but seems indifferent towards geomancy (although the question which he answers quotes a verse stating that "only God knows the *ghayb*").[116]

111 Heinen, *Islamic Cosmology*, 81–85.

112 M. Balivet, *Autour des Ottomans: Français, Mameluks, Grecs (XIVe – XIXe siècles)* (Istanbul 2011), 28–29.

113 *Behcetü't-tevârîh*, ed. Almaz, 99–100.

114 Şen, "Practicing Astral Magic", 87–88.

115 Ibid., 86.

116 M. E. Düzdağ, *Şeyhülislâm Ebussuud Efendi fetvaları ışığında 16. asır Türk hayatı* (Istanbul 1983), 199.

Even Kâtib Çelebi, who so ardently minimized the importance of astrology in theoretical terms, did not refrain from using celestial signs as an explanation for Osman II's death at the hands of the rebels:

> Everything in the world of causes has virtual causes (*esbâb-ı ma'neviyye*, meaning that the "true" ones are none else than God's will). Apart from the aforementioned sultan's having an unfortunate ascendant (horoscopus), he had been enthroned in a firmly inauspicious day at an hour of difficulty.[117]

A follower of Kâtib Çelebi in many respects, including his commitment to Ibn Khaldun's philosophy of history, Na'ima did not agree on the futility of astrology in principle either. An astrologer himself, he considered this science one of the seven conditions to write history:

> Historians, provided that they understand the science of planetary influences, should record the influences which conjunctions had upon affairs, the changes of years, eclipses, and the other ascendants, scientifically. If they are able to search out the visible effects which—as people assert—the great, active astral bodies, those bodies which release the angels who are charged with the execution of God's decrees, have exerted upon the tribes of the past, if they are able to search out conditions which these forces manifest in the social order of the state and then insert concrete proofs in their account of events, then they will have displayed their authority as experts in astrology.[118]

Na'ima uses in fact his astrological knowledge to explain or illustrate historical events;[119] a few decades later Abdi Efendi begins his account of the 1730 rebellion with a number of meteorological and astronomical phenomena, naming them "terrestrial and celestial signs".[120]

Still, it seems that the belief in astrology waned throughout the eighteenth century. The poet Nabi (d. 1712) warns against the use of astrology and

117 Z. Aycibin, "Kâtib Çelebi, *Fezleke*. Tahlil ve metin", unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Mimar Sinan University, 2007, 688.

118 Quoted in L. V. Thomas, *A Study of Na'ima*, ed. N. Itzkowitz (New York 1972), 114.

119 See also G. Şen, "Das Ereignis von Edirne (1703). Astrologie als Strategie zur Herrschaftlegitimation und Kontingenzbewältigung", *Das Mittelalter*, 20:1 (2015), 115–138.

120 Abdi, *1730 Patrona ihtilâli hakkında bir eser: Abdi tarihi*, ed. F. R. Unat (Ankara 1999), 5–6.

geomancy (although he admits that the latter used to be a real science), urging the reader to "forget the thought of the future" (*âtiye fikrin unut*); his imitator Vehbi (d. 1809) is even harsher, claiming that all the proofs of astrology are hypothetical (*anın cümle delîli zannî*).[121] A major historian, Şemdanizade Süleyman Efendi (d. 1779), not only rejected the sinister prognostications of astrologers on the occasion of an eclipse, but he had the nerve to attack no less a predecessor than Na'ima:

> As he was familiar with the science of astrology, Na'ima applies *post facto* prognostications on some events and maintains that historians must be familiar with astrology. Although he was a real pioneer [as a historiographer], his belief in the sinister signs of astrology discredits him, and thus he did not attain such glory as the ones that followed. What is necessary for historians is to distinguish good from evil and narrate the past with a right eye, not [pretending to] know the invisible.[122]

One decade later, Abdullah Halim Efendi, author of a sui generis political treatise named *Seyfü'l-izzet* ("Sword of glory") composed in 1791, rejects astrology on the grounds that astrologers do not have access to the invisible (*gayb*); they use their experience (*tecrübe*) instead, but "experience does not produce knowledge; it is not a sign, only an indication" (*tecrübe, esbâb-ı ilmden değildir. Tecrübe, alâmet dahi olmaz, olsa emâre olur*).[123] By this time, even the Sultans Abdulhamid I (r. 1774–1789) and Selim III (r. 1789–1807) were reluctant to listen to their chief astrologers, although they felt compelled to for the sake of tradition.[124] And half a century later, in 1848, even a professional astrologer would express his doubts regarding his science as he had seen no

121 Nâbî, *Hayriyye*, ed. İ. Pala (Istanbul 1989), 106 (v. 647); Sünbülzâde Vehbî, *Lutfiyye-i Vehbî*, ed. G. Tanıdır Alıcı (Kahramanmaraş 2011), 60 (v. 121).

122 Şem'danizade, *Şem'dânî-zâde Fındıklılı Süleyman Efendi târihi: Mür'i't*-tevârîh, ed. M. M. Aktepe (Istanbul 1978), II, 40. Cemal Kafadar pointed out this passage in an interview in the journal *Kılavuz*, 48 (April 2008), 69.

123 A. Şahin, "Abdullah Halim Efendi'nin *Seyfü'l-izzet ila hazreti sahibi'd-devlet* adlı kitabının çevirim yazısı ve değerlendirilmesi", unpublished MA thesis, Istanbul, Marmara University, 2009, 188; cf. Sariyannis, *Ottoman Political Thought*, 366–368.

124 Aydüz, "Osmanlı Devleti'nde müneccimbaşılık müessesesi", 180.

benefit from applying it to his everyday life.[125] Most likely, the state-of-the-art is not insufficient to allow us to reach a safe conclusion with these few sources; and moreover, even if there was indeed a retreat of belief in astrology from the second half of the eighteenth century on, we cannot at this moment know if it is to be attributed to an influence of more pious, Sunna-oriented explanations, a supposed "disenchantment of the world", or both.

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In the end of his pioneering survey of Ottoman occult manuscripts, Jan Schmidt states that

> The scrapbooks in particular seem to indicate that literary Ottoman culture as it was absorbed and passed on by such varying figures... from, say 1680 to 1835, and perhaps even as late as 1900, was still to a large extent of a mediaeval nature... There is no development or change in the texts encountered in our manuscripts, nor do they disappear, and identical letter-tables or magic squares can be found in volumes produced in the seventeenth or the nineteenth century. Magic and the belief in divination were part and parcel of a closed, some would even say claustrophobic, world picture...[126]

This statement may arguably be valid for the Ottoman vernacular culture; and one may wonder whether the methods and principles of learned divination changed through time, a question that cannot be answered without meticulous study of such texts. Yet, as far as it concerns knowledge and control of the future, one might argue that the belief in historical laws, initiated as we saw with Kâtib Çelebi's endorsement of Ibn Khaldun's theories and infiltrated in wide intellectual circles throughout the eighteenth century, led to a shift of "foretelling" theories and practices from a supernatural to a natural, historical and markedly secular sphere. We saw above both Kâtib Çelebi and Abdi Efendi adding celestial signs to their narration of such major events as the revolts of 1622 and 1730. On the other hand, however, we should note that, while Kâtib Çelebi cites some astrological signs prognosticating Osman II's death,

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

126 Schmidt, "The Occult Sciences", 253.

he only gives "human agency" reasons for the 1622 rebellion as such; and the same can be said with Abdi's narrative on the 1730 revolt. This rejection of any links between natural phenomena and historical events seems to have prevailed by the second half of the eighteenth century.[127] In a sort of exception, Ahmed Resmi Efendi speaks in 1772 of historical laws which prevent states of waging perpetual warfare, noting that some exceptions (Suleyman's wars and the Russian attacks since 1768) are a paradox (literally an "error of nature", *galat-ı tabi'at*) to be attributed to the astrological conjecture.[128] One may wonder whether the important thing here is the influence of these conjectures or their ephemeral nature. In the beginnings of the nineteenth century, one of the pieces Sünbülzade Vehbi added to his *Lutfiyye*, the imitation of Nabi's *Hayriyye* one century earlier, concerns the benefits of studying history:

> By reading the experiences of the cities, you will discover and understand their secrets... When you will be aware of the [different] stages of the states (*vâkıf-ı etvâr-ı düvel*), you will know their secrets... And by understanding the good and bad aspects of the ancestors, you will be informed of the descendants as well (*fehm idüp nîk ü bed-i eslâfı / andan âgâh idesin ahlâfı*).[129]

In fact, this development (if indeed it is one) may have begun even earlier. Whereas, as we saw, he does not deny the reality of magic and prognostication), Taşköprüzade's description of fortune-telling (*'arāfa*), copied verbatim by Kâtib Çelebi, is quite impressive in its rationalistic outlook:

> This science deducts some future events from present ones (*al-istidlāl bi-ba'z al-hawādis al-hāliyya 'ila al-hawādis al-ātiyya*), through the hidden affinities and similarities (*bi l-munāsaba wa l-mushābaha al-khafiyya*) between them, and through the associations and bonds connecting cause and effect. Because these links are concealed, they are known only to a few people, who can take a guess either by experiments (*tajārib*) or by a state consigned to them by the Prophet.[130]

127 See Menchinger, "Free Will, Predestination", 461–462.

128 See Sariyannis, *Ottoman Political Thought*, 404.

129 *Lutfiyye-i Vehbî*, ed. Tanıdır Alıcı, 92-95 (v. 279–290).

130 *Miftâh as-Sa'âdah*, eds Bakry and Abu'l-Nur, I, 357; *Keşf-el-zunun*, eds Yaltkaya and Bilge, 1131; *Keşfü'z-zunûn*, trans. Balcı, 904.

Some of this rationale may be evidence of the influence of Ibn Khaldun's thought, whose *Muqaddima* Kâtib Çelebi uses in his encyclopedia.[131] Attempting to elaborate his theory on prophecy, based on the special qualities of some souls, the Tunisian scholar had argued that the world "shows nexuses between causes and things caused, combinations of some parts of creation with others, and transformations of some existent things into others" and that some people are provided "with knowledge of the measurements and positions of the spheres, and also with knowledge of the existence of the essences beyond, the influence of which is noticeable in the spheres". Still, Ibn Khaldun's theory on soothsaying (*kahāna*) was based on the particular qualities of soothsayers' souls, which could be endowed with unusual powers of perception and intuition, rather than their rational deduction of future results from present causes, as Taşköprüzade and Kâtib Çelebi imply.[132]

The resurgence of the theological discussions concerning human agency in the same period, of which I talked in the beginning, is telling: as shown by Ethan Menchinger and others, Kâtib Çelebi's preoccupation on causes paved the way for a new understanding of causality where human agency had a strong role to play. The introduction of the concept of "particular will", which is under human control, seems to have been connected with the Nakşbendi order.[133] The role of Nakşbendi thought in Ottoman intellectual history of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries has only recently begun to be highlighted.[134] Their emphasis on sobriety and their affinities with the

131 On Ibn Khaldun's influence upon Kâtib Çelebi's work, see Sariyannis, "Ottoman Ibn Khaldunism Revisited", 259–261.

132 Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqqadimah: An Introduction to History. The Classic Islamic History of the World*, trans. and intr. F. Rosenthal, abridged by N. J. Dawood (Princeton 2005), 74–75, 79–80.

133 Bruckmayr, "The Particular Will".

134 B. Abu-Manneh, "The Naqshbandiyya-Mujaddidiyya in the Ottoman Lands in the Early Nineteenth Century", *Welt des Islams* 22:1 (1982), 1–36; M. Gaborieau, A. Popovic and T. Zarcone (éds), *Naqshbandis. Cheminements et situation actuelle d'un ordre mystique musulman* (Istanbul – Paris 1990); D. Le Gall, *A Culture of Sufism: Naqshbandis in the Ottoman World, 1450–1700* (New York 2005); Bruckmayr, "The Particular Will". Of equal importance, although to a different direction, must have been the intrusion of al-Suhrawardi's Illuminationist thought: see Kurz, *Ways to Heaven*, 206–215; M. Arıcı, "Is it Possible to Speak of an Illuminationist Circle in the Ottoman Scholarly World? An Analysis of the Ottoman Scholarly Conception of Illuminationism", *Nazariyat*, 4:3 (2018), 1–48.

Kadızadeli movement (it should be noted here that Vehbi presents himself extremely favorable toward both the Kadızadelis and the Nakşbendi),[135] as well as their role in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century reforms, made them pivotal agents for what may be referred to as an Enlightenment of sorts or perhaps a "disenchantment of the world", together with the Kadızadelis who rebutted the (Halveti) Sufis' claim of a marked presence of the supernatural in everyday life.[136] At the same time, there is seeming evidence of materialist or even atheistic trends among Ottoman intellectuals from the late seventeenth century on.[137] Given this prevailing climate, it is only natural to discover that belief in the predictability of the future had become more rational and scientific and less informed by supernatural or occult powers.

135 *Lutfiyye-i Vehbî*, ed. Tanıdır Alıcı, 78–81 and 84–85 (v. 211-213 and 234–235).

136 See 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; B. Tezcan, "The Portrait of the Preacher as a Young Man: Two Autobiographical Letters by Kadızade Mehmed from the Early Seventeenth Century", in Sariyannis (ed.), *Political Thought and Practice*, 187–250 at 229–241.

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