

Languages of Ottoman Esotericism

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The Hardic tongue of the Archipelago, though it has no more magic power in it than any other tongue of men, has its roots in the Old Speech, that language in which things are named with their true names: and the way to the understanding of this speech starts with the Runes that were written when the islands of the world first were raised up from the sea.

(Ursula K. Le Guin, *A Wizard of Earthsea*)

From amongst the early modern Islamicate cultures, Ottoman esotericism is arguably the least studied. Commonly considered (at least by Arabists, as Ottomanists have moved away from this notion) a period of decline for Islamic cul-

1 Earlier drafts of this paper were read at Osmanistischer Studienkreis: “Sprache und Sprachen im osmanischen Raum” (Bonn, 14–15 February 2020) and at the 2nd European Network for the Study of Islam and Esotericism (ENSIE) Conference “Islamic Esotericism in Global Contexts” (Louvain, December 3–5, 2020). I wish to thank all participants in both venues for their suggestions, as well as Zeynep Aydoğan, Aslıhan Gürbüz, Güneş Işıksel and Aslı Niyazioğlu who read thoroughly an earlier version and made insightful additions and remarks. 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).

ture, when all science (including occult ones) barely went beyond mere copying and commenting on older authorities, the Ottoman period is in fact a highly compelling intersection of influences and intellectual movements, closely interwoven with social dynamics. This was a time when scholarly activity was equally if not more intensive outside the medrese system; when vernacular culture charted its own course, albeit with an unprecedented degree of literacy and breadth of authorship; when “fundamentalist” and various Sufi influences coexisted with “materialistic” trends and unintentionally contributed to a disenchanting view of the world, whereas at the same time a Sufi culture was moving in the opposite direction. In short, it was a period of time well worth focusing on for scholarly research. In comparison to other societies of the Islamic world, such as the Mamluk, the Safavid or the Timurid empires, Ottoman society was an amalgamation of ethnoreligious and linguistic groups, coexisting in an environment of varying tolerance and contributing, one might say, to a shared culture that was common yet dominated by the Islamic, Turkish (and to an extent Arabic) speaking communities. Furthermore, Christian groups and especially the Greek Orthodox communities constituted privileged channels for communication with Central and Western European scientific traditions, including esoteric ideas; and the same applies for Jewish communities, whether Ashkenazi, Romaniot or Sephardic. The question I wish to raise (but not necessarily answer) with this paper is whether this peculiar position of the Ottoman Empire within the global context was influencing its esoteric production. The paper will focus on an examination of the languages used and mentioned in the texts of Ottoman Muslim esotericism. In doing so, I attempt to establish whether and why there are some languages that seem “privileged” in that they allow access to the supernatural realm.² I seek to explore the conflict between the emphasis on Arabic as a sacred language (and thus closely connected to the science of letters), on the one hand, and other languages and alphabets connected to a

2 I was at an advanced stage of writing of this paper when I took notice of Aslıhan Gürbüzeli's work and especially of her paper “Bilingual Heaven: Was There a Distinct Persianate Islam in the Early Modern Ottoman Empire?”, *Philological Encounters*, 6 (2021), 214–241, which is indispensable for any complete discussion of this topic. I wish to thank Dr. Gürbüzeli who generously shared with me her then still unpublished work. On the non-Muslim populations and their conceptions of sacred language, albeit in a period later than the one studied here, see J. Strauss, “Langue(s) sacrées et recherche de langue sacrée(s) dans l'Empire ottoman au XIX^e siècle”, in R. J. Noël (ed.), *Hiéroglossie I. Moyen-Âge latin, Monde arabo-persan, Tibet, Inde. Collège de France 16–17 juin 2015* (Paris 2019), 115–152.

past associated with Hermetic wisdom, such as Greek or Syriac, on the other. I wish to emphasize that this is a preliminary survey of a topic that has not yet been the focus of scholarly research. For this reason, also, my discussion will not be restricted to a focus on a short interval of the long Ottoman pre-modern period. Conversely, the scarcity of references shaped my preference for presenting examples spanning the vast duration from the fifteenth to the eighteenth centuries. The phenomena being examined were neither static, nor occurring in a vacuum. Rather, major developments in social and cultural milieus continued to have their impacts on the ideas at the core of this study. However, we must be cautious when identifying them in such a peripheral cultural issue, especially with so little material having been studied.

Firstly, a few words are necessary on the languages spoken or understood by the Ottomans—and by “Ottomans” here I mean learned, Muslim, mostly Turkish-speaking members of the intellectual elite, as these form the focus of my research. An educated Ottoman Muslim would normally have at least an adequate reading knowledge of the “three languages” or *elsine-i selase*: Turkish, Arabic, Persian.³ Ulema would be more competent in Arabic, which they were taught at the medreses, whereas litterateurs and often Sufis were prone to reading and writing in Persian, not to take into account the native tongue of many ulema and Sufis originating from Arab-speaking or Persian-speaking (especially in the first centuries and particularly after the rise of the Safavids in Iran) regions.⁴ On the other hand, a great part of the Ottoman military and administrative elite must at least have a cursory understanding of Greek, Russian or Italian, in addition to Bosnian and Georgian, since they originated in the *devşirme* system or were former prisoners of war or slaves. Aside from pashas

3 See the detailed and comprehensive survey by C. Woodhead, “Ottoman Languages”, in C. Woodhead (ed.), *The Ottoman World* (London 2011), 143–158; L. Johanson, É. Csátó, H. Stein, B. Brendemoen and C. Römer, “The Linguistic Landscape of Istanbul in the Seventeenth Century”, in É. Á. Csátó, A. Menz, F. Turan (eds), *Spoken Ottoman in Mediator Texts* (Wiesbaden 2016), 35–44. On the social content of Ottoman Turkish language see E. Eldem, “Parler d’empire : le turc ottoman comme langue de discrimination et de ségrégation”, in Noël (ed.), *Hiéroglossie I*, 153–167.

4 On the usage of Persian see now M. U. İnan, “Imperial Ambitions, Mystical Aspirations: Persian Learning in the Ottoman World”, in N. Green (ed.), *The Persianate World: The Frontiers of an Eurasian Lingua Franca* (Oakland 2019), 75–92; cf. also F. Richard, “Lecteurs ottomans de manuscrits persans du XVI^e au XVIII^e siècle”, *Revue des mondes musulmans et de la Méditerranée* [online], 87–88 (1999), 79–83.

and governors, such people could also become scholars.⁵ It seems that throughout the eighteenth century more and more Muslim scholars and administrators sought to obtain at least a reading knowledge of European languages, while there are no known cases of speakers of Eastern languages such as the various Indian languages or Chinese among the Ottoman elite.⁶

The languages of the sources of Ottoman esotericism reflect this diversity of the languages spoken and read in the empire. Whereas vernacular culture (more and more visible from the late seventeenth century on) was commonly written in Ottoman Turkish (and Arabic in the Arab regions), the language in which a scholarly text was written was to a degree determined by its genre. Encyclopaedias were more often than not written in Arabic, to fit to the medieval tradition of encyclopaedism, whereas the horoscopes and astrological notes were usually written in Persian, following the large astronomical corpus that had recently flourished in Central Asia. Scholarly treatises on magic, the construction of talismans and the like were often composed in Arabic, since they were heavily relying on the tradition of al-Būnī's thirteenth-century "Great sun of knowledge" (*Shams al-mā'arif al-kubrā*), as it was popularized in the fifteenth century, again in Arabic, by 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Biṣṭāmī (d. ca. 1455), a letrist scholar who exerted tremendous influence in the Ottoman intelligentsia throughout the fifteenth and most of the sixteenth century; all the more since the first full exposition of the "science of letters" is to be found in Ibn 'Arabī's *Meccan Revelations*. Nevertheless, a multitude of translations into Ottoman Turkish for all these genres are available, and it is probable that if one includes all manuscripts pertaining to esotericism, including vernacular manuals and notebooks, Turkish would be the prevalent language.



5 T. Krstić, "Of Translation and Empire: Sixteenth-Century Ottoman Imperial Interpreters as Renaissance Go-Betweens", in Woodhead (ed.), *The Ottoman World*, 130–142; M. Sariyannis (with a chapter by E. E. Tuşalp Atiyas), *A History of Ottoman Political Thought up to the Early Nineteenth Century* (Leiden 2019), 384–400; G. Hagen, *Ein osmanischer Geograph bei der Arbeit. Entstehung und Gedankenwelt von Katib Celebis Ğihannüma* (Berlin 2003), 66–68 and 277–280.

6 See the studies in Green (ed.), *The Persianate World*.

1. On the origin of languages

Arabic, of course, was not the only language in the world, and as we will see other languages were also associated with the wisdom and prophecy of the ancient world. This association was even more powerful when the names of Idrīs or Hermes were evoked, as they constituted a direct link to Islamic esotericism. Idrīs was usually credited with inventing alphabets or scripts: this attribution is repeated throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries by authors as diverse as the Bayrami sheikh Ilyas Ibn ʿĪsā Saruḥānī (d. 1559),⁷ the polymath Mustafa ʿĀlī (d. 1600)⁸ or the famous traveller Evliya Çelebi (d. after 1684). Evliya, furthermore, explains that

The first to invent languages of various sorts was the prophet Idrīs, since he was the first whom God invested with the myriad sciences. He was a scribe, and he recorded the scriptures revealed to him and bound them in books. Before the flood he secreted all of these books in the pyramids across the Nile... After the flood these books were taken out and read by the ancient philosophers.⁹

Notably, Evliya speaks not of the invention of alphabets, but of languages; but given his rather haphazard way of writing, he may well have been referring to alphabets, especially since there is no other such reference in Ottoman literature. Certainly, the notion that Idrīs had built the pyramids and inscribed all the knowledge of things celestial he had acquired, so as they would not be lost in the Great Flood (which he had foreseen), was a commonplace in Islamic hermetic tradition;¹⁰ apart from Evliya, we can see it repeated by a series of authors from the sixteenth century up to an anonymous compiler summarizing Taşköprüzade's encyclopaedia in 1741, for instance.¹¹

Opinions on man's first language and the successive linguistic differentiation

7 E. Kaçar, "İbn-i İsa'nın *Kavā'id-i teshīrāt* isimli eseri: inceleme ve metin", unpublished M.A. thesis, Boğaziçi University, 2019, 112–113.

8 Mustafa ʿĀlī, *Mustafa ʿĀlī's Epic Deeds of Artists: A Critical Edition of the Earliest Ottoman Text about the Calligraphers and Painters of the Islamic World*, edited, translated and commented by E. Akın-Kıvanç (Leiden 2011), 169, 171–172, 176 (=296–297, 298–299, 303).

9 R. Dankoff, *From Mahmud Kaşgari to Evliya Çelebi: Studies in Middle Turkic and Ottoman Literatures* (Istanbul 2008), 283.

10 See *EP*, s.v. "Idrīs" (G. Vajda).

11 N. Ü. Karaarslan (ed.), *Kevâkib-i seb'a risâlesi: XVIII. asrın ortalarına kadar Türkiye'de ilim ve ilmiyeye dâir bir eser* (Ankara 2015), 109.

of humanity differed. A debate regarding the language spoken by Adam and on whether language was established by God's decree (*tawqīf*) or by convention (*muwāda'a / iṣṭilāḥ*), is evident in medieval Arabic grammars and treatises thereof. In these works, such debates often merged with the question as to whether the Quran was created or not, in the context of the Mu'tazilite-Ash'arite controversies.¹² Whereas the discussion of the language spoken by Adam had been perhaps resolved within the realm of traditional *medrese* scholarship by the end of the tenth century. This can be deduced by the fact that no evidence of such ongoing debates can be found. Indeed, fourteenth and early sixteenth century scholars such as Ibn Taymiyya or al-Suyūṭī¹³ seem to have favoured the Ash'ari view that language was bestowed by God's decree (*tawqīf*), but with more emphasis to the innate linguistic capacities of man rather than Arabic language *per se*.¹⁴ On the other hand, Sufi thought favoured an elaborate theory on metaphor

12 See H. Loucel, "L'origine du langage d'après les grammairiens arabes", *Arabica*, 11 (1964), 151–187; B. G. Weiss, "Language in Orthodox Muslim Thought: A Study of 'Waq' Al-Lughah' and Its Development", unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Princeton University, 1966; idem, "Medieval Muslim Discussions of the Origin of Language", *Zeitschrift der deutschen morgenländischen Gesellschaft*, 124 (1974), 33–41; idem, "Ilm al-waq': an Introductory Account of a Later Muslim Philological Science", *Arabica*, 34 (1987), 339–356; A. Czapkiewicz, *The Views of the Medieval Arab Philologists on Language and its Origin in the Light of as-Suyūṭī's 'al-Muzhir'*, (Krakow 1988); K. Versteegh, "Linguistic Attitudes and the Origin of Speech in the Arab World", *Understanding Arabic: Essays in Contemporary Arabic Linguistics in Honor of El-Said Badawi* (Cairo 1996), 24–25; M. Shah, "The Philological Endeavours of the Early Arabic Linguists: Theological Implications of the *tawqīf-iṣṭilāḥ* Antithesis and the *majāz* Controversy — Part I", *Journal of Qur'anic Studies*, 1 (1999), 27–46; idem, "Classical Islamic Discourse on the Origins of Language: Cultural Memory and the Defense of Orthodoxy", *Numen*, 58 (2011), 314–343; M. Lauri, "Three Ways to Happiness. Arabic Grammars of Salvation", in A. Keidan (ed.), *The Study of South Asia Between Antiquity and Modernity. Parallels and Comparisons: Coffee Break Conference 2 [Supplemento no 2 alla Rivista degli studi orientali, n.s. vol. LXXXVII]* (Pisa 2014), 117–133, esp. 119–123; H. Sak, "The Issue of the Origin of Language in Ibn Jinnī's *Al-Ḥaṣā'is*", unpublished MA thesis, Ibn Haldun University, 2019. On some aspects of the relation between form and meaning in Arabic linguistics and poetics cf. also A. Key, *Language Between God and the Poets: ma'nā in the Eleventh Century* (Oakland 2018).

13 F. Grande, "History, Comparativism, and Morphology: Al-Suyūṭī and Modern Historical Linguistics", in A. Gherseti (ed.), *Al-Suyūṭī, a Polymath of the Mamlūk Period: Proceedings of the themed day of the First Conference of the School of Mamlūk Studies. Ca' Foscari University, Venice 23 June 2014* (Leiden 2017), 201–226.

14 Shah, "Classical Islamic Discourse on the Origins of Language", 334–339.

and the properties of words, such as in this late seventeenth-century description by İsmâ'îl Hâkîkî Bursevî (d. 1725):

The true names are not things that can be read, heard, written or learnt by heart. For Sufis, metaphor and truth (*al-majāz wa l-ḥaḳīka*) are thus: metaphor and truth are exactly the opposite of what is meant by these terms by the external people, because according to them metaphor is when a word is used out of its real meaning, as this can be found in dictionaries—for instance, when the word “lion” is used for somebody valiant. According to them, truth is when the word is used in its real meaning, as this is recorded in a dictionary—as when the word “lion” is used for the carnivore animal. This is why everything that is metaphor and truth for the external people, is metaphor for the Sufis; because in truth a name is composed by a manifestation (*al-ism fi l-ḥaḳīka al-ta'ayyun*). The meaning of divine names (*ma'nā al-asmā' al-ilāhīyya*) is divine manifestations, which are matters of hidden essence and latent truths (*al-shu'ūnāt al-zātīyya al-ḡaybīyya wa l-ā'yān al-sābita al-ilmīyya*); the meaning of cosmic names (*al-asmā' al-kawnīyya*) is cosmic manifestations, which are manifestations of spirits and bodies (*ta'ayyunāt al-arwāḥ wa l-ajsām*). The former are active and effective, whereas the latter are under these active ones' influence and effect. For instance, the word “man” is a real active agent and influences others; an example to the other [category] is the word “woman” which is influenced by the act of the active one.¹⁵

For some traditions, linguistic diversity was present already from Adam's times, since “he knew all languages”: this is what we read in Yazıcıoğlu Bîcân's late fifteenth-century catechism and in al-Biṣṭāmî's encyclopaedic *Fawā'id al-miskiyya* (Adam was speaking seven hundred languages, of whom Arabic was the superior),¹⁶ but also in the anonymous 1741 encyclopaedist mentioned above;¹⁷ after all, no less an influential compiler than al-Suyūṭî had recorded a tradition ac-

15 İsmâil Hakkı Bursevî, *Tamâmü'l-feyz fi bâbi'r-ricâl: Atpazarî Kutup Osman Efendi menâkıbı* (İnceleme – Çeviri – Tipkibasım), eds R. Muslu and A. Namlı (Istanbul 2020), 209–210.

16 A. Beyazıt, “Ahmed Bîcan'ın ‘Müntehâ’ isimli Fusûs tercümesi ışığında tasavvuf düşüncesi”, unpublished M.A. thesis, Marmara Üniversitesi, 2008, 331; Ö. Yağmur, “Terceme-i kitâb-ı fevâ'ihü'l-miskiyye fi'l-fevâtihi'l-mekkiyye (Metin – sözlük – şahıs, yer, eser, tarikat ve kabile adları indeksi)”, unpublished MA thesis, İstanbul Üniversitesi, 2007, 106/80b. The same traditions are also mentioned by Gelibolulu Mustafa Âlî, *Künhü'l-abbâr. 1. Rükün (tenkitli metin)*, eds S. Donuk and D. Örs (Istanbul 2020), 1: 453, who, however, insists that the differentiation of languages only occurred after the Deluge, as we shall see.

17 Karaarslan (ed.), *Kevâkib-i seb'a risâlesi*, 109.

ording to which God had created “a thousand tongues” (*lisān*) for the Throne (*al-'arsh*) and “a thousand nations” on earth, each one praising God “with one of the tongues belonging to the throne”.¹⁸

For most authors, however, Adam was granted one language: and this was not always Arabic (whereas it continued to retain its exalted place as God's instrument for creating the world). Syriac, as we shall see, was the primary focus of such discussions, from fifteenth-century authors al-Biṣṭāmī and Bīcān to ʿĀlī. And Evliya provides a clear-cut history of languages, where Arabic was spoken in Paradise but not after the expulsion of Adam and Eve:

First God commanded all the angels to speak Arabic. When the prophet Adam entered Paradise out of the earth, Gabriel taught Adam Arabic, and he spoke Arabic with Eve, with the angels, and with God Himself... But after Adam fell from Paradise he forgot Arabic, out of grief at separation from God. Then Adam met with Eve on Mt. Arafat... and by God's command they spoke a language close to Arabic, namely Hebrew. In fact, the word for Hebrew, *'ibrī*, is merely a metathesis of the word for Arabic, *'arebi*... When the descendants of Adam spread, they spoke Hebrew, Syriac, and Imrani. This was so until Ishmael was sent on his prophetic mission, when for the first time Arabic appeared among them. As for Syriac and Imrani, these and several (other) languages have survived since the time of the prophet and scribe Idrīs.¹⁹

The confusion of languages was thus a later phenomenon, usually associated with the tower of Babel or, less often, Noah's deluge. Arguing against al-Diyar-

18 A. M. Heinen, *Islamic Cosmology. A Study of as-Suyūṭī's al-Hay'a as-sanīya fī l-hay'a as-sunnīya with critical edition, translation, and commentary* (Beirut 1982), 132 (1.15); in another tradition (*ibid.*, 130, 1.3) these tongues are to be understood as organs of the Throne, not languages (cf. Heinen's comment in *ibid.*, 189).

19 Dankoff, *From Mahmud Kaşgari*, 282-283; *idem*, *An Ottoman Mentality: The World of Evliya Çelebi* (Leiden 2004), 176-177. Imrani is an unidentified language purportedly spoken in Sudan: S. A. Kahraman, Y. Dağlı and R. Dankoff, *Evliyâ Çelebi seyahatnâmesi, X. Kitap: Topkapı Sarayı Kütüphanesi Bağdat 306, Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi Pertev Paşa 462, Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi Hacı Beşir Ağa 452 numaralı yazmalarının mukayeseli transkripsiyonu – dizini* (Istanbul 2007), 497; R. Dankoff, N. Tezcan and M. D. Sheridan, *Ottoman Explorations of the Nile: Evliya Çelebi's 'Matchless Pearl These Reports of the Nile' Map and His Accounts of the Nile and the Horn of Africa in The Book of Travels* (London 2018), 338-339. Dankoff suggests that it “seemingly relates to ‘Imran the father of Moses’” (Dankoff, *An Ottoman Mentality*, 177 fn38).

bakrī²⁰ and Mirkhwand (d. 1498) who had suggested that the diversity of languages was the product of a gradual process due to the growing number of men and their communities, settling in different places, Mustafa 'Āli (d. 1600) finds this opinion "completely impossible and idiotic" since "the increasing number of communities and nations does not necessarily bring about a diffusion of languages" and claims that

the differentiation of languages was caused by the disarray on the 'night of the confusion of languages' when the increasing darkness and growing fear and panic... made everybody forget what he knew, and by the will of God other languages appeared.²¹

At another point, he refers to Coptic/Ḳıybīyye as "inspired by God" after the confusion of languages.²² In contrast, a late-seventeenth-century *Vahdetname*, composed between 1689 and 1691 by the astronomer İshak Hocası Ahmed Efendi (d. 1708), mentions the "differentiation of languages" as a rather late occurrence (in the times of Ergū ibn-i Fāliğ, several generations after Noah), linked to the ongoing corruption and the fragmentation of humanity into diverse groups, each of which produced its own language (*itdi her firqa bir lisān izhār*).²³

But if languages other than Arabic were prevalent in pre-Babel times, why did they lose their powers? It appears that the common explanation was borrowed by anti-Christian and anti-Jewish polemic. This is evident in its use of the notion of *tabrif*, i.e. that Jews and Christians had distorted the genuine pro-

20 On this rather obscure figure see *EP*, s.v. "al-Diyārbakrī, Ḥusayn b. Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan" (F. Rosenthal). Rosenthal challenges the commonly accepted date of his death (1582) and argues for the much earlier date, somewhere in the 1550s, given by Kâtib Çelebi. Cf. B. Lellouch, *Les Ottomans en Égypte. Historiens et conquérants au XVII^e siècle* (Paris 2006), 125.

21 He also refutes the idea that İdrīs used seventy-two languages, since this multiplication only occurred after the Deluge. J. Schmidt, *Pure Water for Thirsty Muslims: A Study of Muḥtafā 'Āli of Gallipoli's* Künhü l-ahbār (Leiden 1991), 68-69; Âli, *Künhü'l-abbār. 1. Rüküm*, eds Donuk and Örs, 1: 855 (reason of the differentiation of languages), 521 (İdrīs).

22 *Ibid.*, 1: 601 (*ilhām-ı ilāhīyye ile*).

23 A. Topal, "Ahmedî (İshak Hocası): *Vahdetnâme-i âlem-engîz* (İnceleme – Metin)", unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Atatürk University, 2011, 295; N. Sofuoğlu, "İshak Hocası Ahmed: *Vahdetnâme-i âlem-engîz*. İnceleme – Metin", unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Dokuz Eylül University, 2012, 441 (v. 1126ff).

phetic discourse of Moses or Jesus.²⁴ An instance of this occurs when Mahmud b. Kadı-ı Manyâs or Manyasoğlu, author of *'Acabü'l-üccâb*, arguably the first Ottoman encyclopaedia dated ca. 1438,²⁵ stresses that Arabic is the noblest language, explaining that:

The form of its letters and the order of its words stands stronger in its properties and [power of] influence, compared to other languages... In contrast, Syriac, Hebrew and other languages have their order of letters and syntax corrupted, and they are now spoken by very few people.²⁶

2. A hierarchy of sacred languages: Arabic first, but not only

If we were to ask whether in Ottoman culture any languages were considered privileged for establishing contact with the supernatural, the answer would certainly be Arabic. Arabic held a central place in the relationship with the supernatural, being the language of the Quran and thus the Islamic language *par excellence*.

Moreover, there is a further reason for the predominant place of Arabic in these texts. The beginning of the Ottoman imperial age coincided with the great blossoming 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.

24 T. Krstić, *Contested Conversions to Islam: Narratives of Religious Change in the Early Modern Ottoman Empire* (Stanford 2011), 85.

25 Princeton University, Islamic MSS, New Series 1010; transcribed by Z. Buçukcu, “Mahmud bin Kadı-ı Manyâs’ın ‘Acabü’l-üccab adlı eserinin transkripsiyon ve dizini”, unpublished MA thesis, Hacettepe University, 2017. On the author see *TDVİA*, s.v. “Manyasoğlu Mahmud” (Mustafa Özkan); Ş. Kalafat, “Anadolu (Osmanlı) sahasında yazılmış en eski tarihli Türkçe matematik risâlesi: Mahmūd bin Kādî-i Manyâs’ın *'Acabü'l-üccâb*’ı – Hesap bölümü–”, *Turkish Studies: International Periodical for the Languages, Literature and History of Turkish or Turkic*, 12/30 (2017), 243–298 (publishing and analysing the mathematical sections); C. Sucu, “The Marvelous Sciences in *'Acabü'l-üccâb*: Disseminating and Reframing of Occult Knowledge for the Ottoman Audience in the Early Fifteenth Century”, unpublished MA thesis, Central European University, 2020.

26 Princeton ms. 71b–72a, Buçukcu, “Mahmud bin Kadı-ı Manyâs’ın *'Acabü'l-üccab*”, 106: *bu teşkilât-ı hurûf ve nazm-ı kelimât havâssa ve te’sîrâta ziyâde durur şâyir elsineden... ammâ bu süryânî ve ’ibrânî ve gayrı diller da’vâtının nazm-ı hurûfında ve tertib-i kelimâtında çok tabrif ve galat olmışdur hem ol dilleri bilür kişi az kalmışdur*.

These theories had deep roots in medieval Arabic alchemy (the so-called Jabirian corpus, attributed to Jābir ibn Ḥayyān), which claimed that every metal has a certain proportion of qualities, reflected in the letters of its Arabic name;²⁷ but even more, it was a result of the role of the language in Islamic theology. Since the Qur'an was considered (universally after the end of the ninth-century debate with the Mu'tazilites) as *written* in heavens (*umm al-kitāb*), i.e. as an uncreated property (not just the word) of God, co-eternal with Him and pre-eternal in essence, each letter of each *sūra* 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-Fārābī, Ibn Sīnā, al-Suhrawardī) had already emerged, angels were identified with letters (for Ibn 'Arabī) and with *sūras* of the Qur'an (al-Būnī). Al-Būnī'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.²⁸ The influence of Hurufism in Ottoman culture, sectarian as it may be, must have enhanced these tendencies.²⁹

27 See P. Lory, *Alchimie et mystique en terre d'islam* (Paris 2003), 130–150.

28 D. Gril, "Esotérisme contre hérésie : 'Abd al-Rahmān al-Bistāmī, un représentant de la science des lettres à Bursa dans la première moitié du XVe siècle", in G. Veinstein (ed.), *Syncretismes et hérésies dans l'Orient seldjoukide et ottoman (XIVe-XVIIIe siècle). Actes du Colloque du Collège de France, octobre 2001* (Paris 2005), 183–195; C. H. Fleischer, "Ancient Wisdom and New Sciences: Prophecies at the Ottoman Court in the Fifteenth and Early Sixteenth Centuries", in M. Farhad and S. Bağcı (eds), *Falnama: The Book of Omens* (Washington 2009), 231–244; J.C. Coulon, *La Magie en terre d'islam au Moyen Age* (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; P. Lory, *La science des lettres en Islam* (Paris 2017); M. Melvin-Koushki, "Astrology, Lettrism, Geomancy: The Occult-Scientific Methods of Post-Mongol Islamicate Imperialism", *Medieval History Journal*, 19/1 (2016), 142–50; idem, "Toward a Neopythagorean Historiography: Kemālpaşazāde's (d. 1534) Lettrist Call for the Conquest of Cairo and the Development of Ottoman Occult-Scientific Imperialism", in L. Saif, F. Leoni, M. Melvin-Koushki and F. Yahya (eds), *Islamicate Occult Sciences in Theory and Practice* (Leiden 2021), 380–419.

29 S. Bashir, *Fazlallah Astarabadi and the Hurufis* (Oxford 2005); F. Usluer, "Le houroufisme: la doctrine et son influence dans la littérature persane et ottomane", unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes, 2007; O. Mir-Kasimov, *Words of Power: Hurūfī Teachings between Shi'ism and Sufism in Medieval Islam. The Original Doctrine of Faḍl Allāh Astarābādī* (London 2015); idem, "The Occult Sciences in Hurūfī Discourse: Science of Letters, Alchemy and Astrology in the Works of Faḍlallāh Astarābādī", in N.

Nevertheless, Arabic was by no means the only language that could carry esoteric features. For one thing, it was language itself that could be “esoteric”, especially if one accepted the version of language created by God’s decree or inspiration, rather than convention. Thus, in his *‘Acabü’l-‘uccāb* Manyasoğlu admits that

a request [from God] can be in any language, Greek, Persian or Arabic; but Arabic is the noblest of all... The form of its letters and the order of its words stands stronger in its properties and [power of] influence, compared to other languages.³⁰

Despite the fact that Arabic is stronger in comparison to other languages, it has no monopoly on the properties of the Divine Names:

These properties are not restricted to the Arabic language; nay, the names of God have properties and exert influence in all languages.³¹

Similarly, Ilyas Ibn ‘Īsā Saruhānī (d. 1559), a Bayrami sheikh who wrote a number of highly influential letterist treatises, explains that a certain Quranic excerpt, which could be used as a prayer in order to obtain one’s wish, can be said in one’s language and has the same influence, and he goes on giving its Turkish translation;³² and the Celvetî sheikh Atpazarî Seyyid ‘Osmān Fazlî (d. 1691), according to *Tamāmu l-feyz fî bâbi r-rijāl*, his monumental biography by İsmâ‘il Hakkî Bursavî (d. 1725), asserted that he would urge disciples to acquire

El-Bizri and E. Orthmann (eds), *The Occult Sciences in Pre-modern Islamic Cultures* (Beirut 2018), 201–221.

30 Princeton ms. 71b–72a, Buçukcu, “Mahmud bin Kadı-ı Manyas’ın *‘Acabü’l-‘uccab*”, 106: *kankı dilege gerekse edülsün gerek rûmî gerek ‘acemî gerek ‘arabî ammâ arabî mecmû’-ı lügatlerden eşrefdür... ve bu teşkilât-ı hurûf ve nazm-ı kelimât havâssa ve t’şîrâta ziyâde durur sâyir elsineden.*

31 Princeton ms. 85b, Buçukcu, “Mahmud bin Kadı-ı Manyas’ın *‘Acabü’l-‘uccab*”, 124: *ammâ bu havâss yalunuz lisân-ı arabîye mahsûs degüldür belki cemî’ elsinede Allah t’âlânun adlarmun havâssı vardur t’şîr eder.*

32 Kaçar, “İbn-i İsa’nın *‘Kavâ‘id-i teşbîrât*”, 150: *ţâlib bu âyet-i kerîmenün ma’nâsım kendi diliyle tazarru’ itmek gâyet mü’essirdür... Türkî dili ile meşgûl olanlar işbu terkîb üzerine kalbinde mefhûmı bağlayup andan okuya; cf. also ibid., 162. The biography that he wrote for his father, Akhisarî Şeyh İsa, has him asserting that God knows Turkish as well (answering a riddle-like question): İlyas İbn İsa Akhisarî Saruhânî, *Akhisarlı Şeyh İsa menâkıbnâmesi* (XVI. yüzyıl), eds S. Küçük and R. Muslu (Akhisar 2003), 170.*

knowledge from Turkish books, if the latter were not able to learn Arabic, because “the aim is knowledge, and knowledge is one, it does not change with languages and vocabularies”.³³ In the same vein, figures associated with numerous languages had their share in esoteric knowledge, and conversely, figures associated with esoteric features were often considered as speaking or understanding several languages. To take only a few examples, the legendary narratives of the history of Constantinople that circulated short after the fall of the city relate the story of one Rukiya, a famous sorcerer of the Maghreb, who purportedly had installed a talisman containing “the properties (*havāss*) [of things] [learnt] by Idrīs, the tablets given to Abraham, the properties from the Tora given to Moses, the names (*esmā*) contained in the Psalms of David, and the wisdom of Loḳmān”.³⁴ In a folk narrative of the early Ottoman dervish Abdāl Mūṣā’s life and miracles, some people wish to test his sanctity and say: “We came to this man as a real saint. He possesses every language (*her dil buna müsahḥardur*); let’s speak to him in Persian”—to which, of course, the saint answers in the same language.³⁵ In a very similar quote, Sarı Saltuk “could write and read in seventy two languages” and “even in *Habeş* (Ethiopian) language”, which he knew “flawlessly (*su gibî*)”.³⁶ Such miraculous phenomena reported across the known world included voices speaking in various languages, as for instance a fountain in Tibet speaking in “Turkish, Indian and Persian voices”, as we read in a roughly contemporary translation of *Ṭūsî’s* cosmography,³⁷ or an oracle

33 Bursevî, *Tamâmü'l-feyz*, eds Muslu and Namlı, 219–220 and facs. 1007–1008.

34 S. Yerasimos, *Konstantiniye ve Ayasofya efsaneleri*, trans. Ş. Tekeli (Istanbul 1993), 21: *bir altundan bir levh düzdü İdris peygamberin havaslarından ve İbrahim peygambere inen subufeden ve hem Musa peygambere gelen Tivrattan içinde olan havaslardan ve Zebur’a gelen esmalardan ve Lokman hekimin hikmetlerinden ve bu esmaları cem’idüb ol levhin üzerine kazdı*. Ottoman *melhemes* or books of prognostication usually take care to note every month in Syriac, Greek (*der-zebân-ı Rûm*) and Persian (they are organized along solar months), but also to note when the new year starts for a series of major peoples (*kavm*): Syrians, Iranians, Arabs, Greeks (*Yunânî, Rûmyân*), Jews and Franks. See Ş. Boyraz, “Türk halk-biliminin yazılı kaynakları olarak melhemeler”, unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Hacettepe University, 2000, 342, 344 etc., 370–371.

35 A. Güzel (ed.), *Abdal Mûsâ velâyetnâmesi* (Ankara 1999), 149.

36 Ebül Hayr-i Rûmî, *Saltuk-nâme*, ed. Ş. H. Akalın, 3 vols (Ankara 1990), 1: 226; quoted in Z. Aydoğan, “An Analysis of the *Saltukname* in its Fifteenth Century Context”, unpublished MA thesis, Boğaziçi University, 2007, 64.

37 Anonymous, *Tercüme-i Acâ’ibü’l-mahlûkât* (İnceleme – Metin – Dizin), eds B. Sarıkaya and G. Kut (Istanbul 2019), 179. Tebbet is supposed to be in Turkestan (ibid., 227).

in Sudan addressing inquirers in each one's language.³⁸ Finally, the anonymous encyclopaedist of 1741, seen also above, describes the knowledge acquired by a series of ancient cultures, most of which occult and related to the preternatural, emphasizing their different languages and writing systems.³⁹

And of course the Prophet Sulayman (Solomon), one of the major esoteric figures of Islam, was famous for being a master of all languages (including that of the birds). Even in dream interpretation, as we read in an early eighteenth-century treatise by 'Abd al-Ġani al-Nābulusī (d. 1731), seeing him in a dream meant that one might learn languages—and if somebody dreamt that they spoke diverse languages, they would acquire a vast kingdom because of the association with Sulayman.⁴⁰

Indeed, dream interpretation was a field where esoteric phenomena and techniques combined with language diversity, as dreamers belong to all kinds of linguistic communities. At the end of the sixteenth century, the poet Nev'î's encyclopaedia notes that dream interpretation can vary according to language, since the image one may see is associated with different words in different languages.⁴¹

[Dream interpretation] varies in six factors: difference in language, difference in confession, difference in occupation, difference in time, difference in place, and difference in circumstance. As for the language difference: if, for example, someone dreams in Persian and sees a quince, his matters will go well (*bib*) because quince means "*bib*" in Persian. And if someone dreams [of a quince] in Arabic, then he will go on a long journey (*sefer*) because quince is called in Arabic *sefercel*, which means "long journey" (*sefer-i cell*).

In the same vein, al-Nābulusī makes the same remark (and with the very same example)⁴² although he often offers interpretations based on associations of

38 Kahraman, Dağlı and Dankoff, *Evlîyâ Çelebi seyahatnâmesi*, X. Kitap, 471–473; Dankoff, Tezcan, Sheridan, *Ottoman Explorations of the Nile*, 294.

39 Karaarslan (ed.), *Kevâkib-i seb'â risâlesi*, 110–115.

40 'Abdel-Ghani al-Nāboulsi, *Merveilles de l'interprétation des rêves*, trans. A. Haridi (Paris 2012), 330 and 615.

41 Nev'î Efendi, *Texts on Popular Learning in Early Modern Ottoman Times*, v. 2, "The Yield of the Disciplines and the Merits of the Texts". *Nev'î Efendi's Encyclopaedia Netâytic el-Fünûn*, eds G. Procházka-Eisl and H. Çelik (Harvard 2015), 128–129.

42 Al-Nāboulsi, *Merveilles de l'interprétation des rêves*, 805.

Arabic words with names (e.g. Sulayman and *salīm* or Christian/*naṣrānī* and *naṣr*).⁴³

In a similar vein, in 1580 there was an effort by the Sufi Muhyiddīn Gülşenī (d. 1605) to create an artificial language, named Bālaybalan, which contained elements from all “three languages” but also had a synthetic structure of its own. Presumably, Muhyiddīn’s aim (if indeed it was his own; there are signs that the development of the vocabulary was a collective endeavour that had been taking place for some time) was to facilitate communication between scholars of the Middle East, as well as to aid the spread of knowledge to the common people, for whom, he seems to have thought, learning his language would be easier.⁴⁴

Thus, in this variety of languages Arabic may be the greatest and most important, but its predominance did not go unchallenged. Nor was its primordial character: the question of whether language was arranged by divine decree or by convention set aside, there was no consensus regarding the language innate to man or even the language spoken by Adam (and in which, according to the Qur’an, God taught him the names of all things). In the fifteenth-century adaptation of Ṭūsī’s cosmography that we saw above, we read the story, well-known from Herodotus, about the king who had some children isolated to determine

43 Ibid., 330, 752. On the other hand, the same author considers seeing an Arab as a sign of easing difficulties and a non-Arab (*‘ajam*) as a sign of difficulties, on the basis of Quranic verses referring to Arab and non-Arab languages (ibid., 527). Elsewhere he speaks of the “strange character” of non-Arabic language (*gharābat kalām al-‘ajam*): ibid., 569; <https://al-maktaba.org/book/1217/271#p1> (accessed on July 2021).

44 M. Sertoğlu, “İlk Milletlerarası Dili Bir Türk İcat Etmişti,” *Hayat Tarih Mecmuası*, 1 (1966), 66–68; M. Koç, *Bāleybelen Muhyî-i Gülşenî: ilk yapma dil* (Istanbul 2005); Encyclopædia Iranica [online edition, 2015], s.v. “Bālaybalan language” (C. G. Häberl), available at <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/balaybalan-language> (accessed on July 2021). It is highly interesting that a similar universal language, āsmānī *zabān* or “heavenly language”, based on Persian grammar with a vocabulary of distorted Persian, Arabic and Indian words, was used in a roughly contemporaneous mystic tract of Zoroastrian tendencies: see Encyclopædia Iranica [online edition, 2015], s.v. “Dasātīr” (Fath-Allāh Mojtaba’ī), available at <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/dasatir> (accessed on July 2021); D. J. Sheffield, “The Language of Heaven in Safavid Iran: Speech and Cosmology in the Thought of Āzār Kayvān and His Followers”, in A. Korangy and D. J. Sheffield (eds), *No Tapping around Philology: A Festschrift in Honor of Wheeler McIntosh Thackston Jr.’s 70th Birthday* (Wiesbaden 2014), 161–183. The influence of al-Suhrawardi in that text is also to be noted; see J. Rose, *Zoroastrianism: An Introduction* (London 2011), 204.

which language they would speak. Contrary to the ancient story, however, which had them speak a Phrygian word, in this case:

they spoke such a kind of language that did not resemble to any of the known language, with God's inspiration.⁴⁵

Such references may also be seen in the context of the Illuminationist/*işrāki* emphasis on the non-linguistic nature of revealed knowledge. Illuminationist philosophy came to play a more and more important role in Ottoman intellectual life from the late sixteenth century onwards,⁴⁶ and its stress on revelatory wisdom as the source of knowledge tended to divest Arabic language of its sacral overtones. In the words of Naşūh Efendi of Belgrade (d. 1573):

The Illuminationists are those who do not speak with the teacher; they absorb the inner meaning of *ḥikma* in the presence of the teacher. They do not speak a single word with the teacher, the teacher does not speak to them.⁴⁷

Here perhaps we should also mention language lore pertaining to jinn or even Satan (Iblis). Such languages, of course, carry no tones of sanctity; they have an esoteric value inasmuch they are clearly non-human creations, pertaining to supernatural beings and possibly created before the creation of man. For instance, in the same adaptation of Ṭūsī's cosmography we read about someone who managed to enter the pyramid of Giza, regarded as the abode of jinn. Three days later, his head appeared from a hole at the summit; he uttered some mysterious words ("*eyşāḥ eyleblehin şāḥiş biliş*") and was never seen again; the words spoken were in the language of jinn (*div sözi*).⁴⁸ And Evliya in his long description of

45 Anonymous, *Tercüme-i Acâibü'l-mablûkat*, ed. Sarıkaya, 313. A version of the same story in a Syriac *ajâib* cosmography, probably dated in the Ottoman times (between the fifteenth and the first half of the seventeenth century) has the children speaking Syriac: S. Minov, *The Marvels Found in the Great Cities and in the Seas and on the Islands: A Representative of 'Ağâ'ib Literature in Syriac* (Cambridge 2021), 55, 135–137.

46 M. Kurz, *Ways to Heaven, Gates to Hell: Fazlîzâde 'Alî's Struggle with the Diversity of Ottoman Islam* (Berlin 2011), 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.

47 Quoted in Gürbüz, "Bilingual Heaven", 232–233.

48 Anonymous, *Tercüme-i Acâibü'l-mablûkat*, ed. Sarıkaya, 386.

Satan's attributes and lore maintains that "in his words there is a preponderance of the letters *k, f* and *j*".⁴⁹

Other sacred languages: Syriac, Hebrew, Persian, Greek

From among the languages of the world, there were some that were specifically granted some sanctity and, therefore, linked with esoteric traditions. Undoubtedly, the language most often associated with the beginning of humankind and the first prophets was Syriac.⁵⁰ In the *corpus Bunianum*, it was associated with the language of angels, with their names translated explicitly from Syriac to Arabic;⁵¹ Abd al-Raḥmān al-Bisṭāmī, who nonetheless introduced the science of (Arabic) letters into the Ottoman world, considered Syriac the first language spoken in the world, its alphabet being the script of Adam:

The script of Adam is Syriac... This Syriac script is the first of all scripts. The other scripts are derived from it.⁵²

Bīcan wrote that it was spoken (exclusively) up to Ibrahim/Abraham's times;⁵³ at the end of the sixteenth century, Mustafa 'Ālī had a similar opinion, as he stated that only after the destruction of the tower of Babel did Syriac make way for Arabic and other languages.⁵⁴ He remarked that:

49 Dankoff, *An Ottoman Mentality*, 184; Y. Dağlı and S. A. Kahraman, *Evlilyâ Çelebi seyahat-nâmesi, IV. Kitap* (Istanbul 2000), 339: *kelimâtında kâf ve fâ ve jâ hürûfu çokdur*.

50 On this idea among Syriac authors see S. Minov, "The Cave of Treasures and the Formation of Syriac Christian Identity in Late Antique Mesopotamia: Between Tradition and Innovation", in B. Bitton-Ashkelony and L. Perrone (eds), *Between Personal and Institutional Religion: Self, Doctrine, and Practice in Late Antique Eastern Christianity* (Turnhout 2013), 155–194 at 171–175; idem, *The Marvels Found in the Great Cities*, 135–136.

51 C. Bonmariage and S. Moureau (eds), *Le Cercle des lettres de l'alphabet: Dâ'irat al-abruf al-abjadiyya. Un traité pratique de magie des lettres attribué à Hermès* (Leiden 2017), 20.

52 Yağmur, "Terceme-i kitâb-ı fevâ'ihü'l-miskiyye", 104–105/79b (as we saw, in another point he asserts that Adam spoke seven hundred languages, of whom Arabic is the best: 106/80b); F. Akyıldız, "Erken dönem Osmanlı tarihinde ilim ve tasnif anlayışı: Abdurrahman Bisṭâmî'nin *el-Fevâ'ihü'l-miskiyye fi'l-fevâ'tihî'l-mekkiyye* adlı eseri ve etkileri", unpublished MA thesis, Istanbul 29 Mayıs University, 2019, 54.

53 Beyazit, "Ahmed Bīcan'ın 'Müntehâ' isimli Fusûs tercümesi", 212.

54 Schmidt, *Pure Water for Thirsty Muslims*, 292; Âlī, *Künhü'l-abbâr. I. Rükün*, ed. Donuk and Örs, I: 413.

From among the prophets of old, those who were Syriac (*Süryānī olanlar*) are Adam, Seth, Idrīs and Noah. The Arab ones are Hūd, Şālih, Şu'ayb, Yūnus (Jonah) and Muhammad; the first of the Israelite ones was Moses and the last Jesus.⁵⁵

According to 'Ālī, Idrīs was able to speak to the clouds in Syriac and they would answer in the same language and obey his orders.⁵⁶

Although not in an Ottoman environment, it is interesting to note here that an early-eighteenth century Moroccan Sufi, Abd al-Aziz al-Dabbāgh (d. 1719), refers to Syriac as “the language of spirits”, whose every letter “indicates a self-contained meaning” and in which “the friends of God... talk to one another”.⁵⁷ To quote another eighteenth-century example, in a 1748 manuscript copy of the well-known cosmography *Dürr-i meknûn*, the paradisiac creatures *burak*, which in all earlier manuscripts are said to speak Arabic, speak “Aramaic”;⁵⁸ this, however, could simply be a copyist's error.

What is perhaps more (and here I draw from ongoing research by Aslı Ni-yazioğlu), the Egyptian hieroglyphs on the Istanbul obelisk were interpreted as mysterious signs or “images” (*suretler*). These, as we read in the famous late fifteenth-century cosmography *Dürr-i meknûn*, reveal “through the science of *cifr* the prophets and rules who were in this world and those would arrive later as well as those who would rule over this land”; according to the author, the dates were written in “Syriac” (*süryanîce*).⁵⁹ Syriac seems to be a preferred option for

55 Ibid., 1: 436 (Seth's name is Syriac for “God's gift”: *ibid.*, 503, 514; however, Nūh/Noah's name is Arabic, his Syriac name being Yeşker: *ibid.*, 534); Adam lamented in Syriac verses the loss of his son Hābīl/Abel (*ibid.*, 501). On Syriac as the language of Idrīs see also *ibid.*, 443.

56 Ibid., 1: 529.

57 Z. V. Wright, *Realizing Islam: The Tijaniyya in North Africa and the Eighteenth-Century Muslim World* (Chapel Hill 2020), 91.

58 J.L. Mattei (ed.), *Les perles cachées (Dürr-i meknun), d'après un manuscrit de 1748. Traduction du turc osmanli, études et notes* (Istanbul 2016), 38; cf. L. Kaptein (ed.), *Dürr-i meknun. Kritische Edition mit Kommentar* (Asch 2007), 88–367, A. Demirtaş (ed.), *Dürr-i meknun (Tıpkıbasım – İnceleme – Çevriyazı – Dizin)* (Istanbul 2009), 100; N. Sakaoglu (ed.), *Dürr-i meknun: saklı inciler* (Istanbul 1999), 29. Unfortunately Jean-Louis Mattei, the editor of the text who died in 2019, only gives a French translation of the manuscript, which was in his possession.

59 *Dürr-i meknûn*, ed. Kaptein, 183–184=456; ed. Demirtaş, 154; ed. Sakaoglu, 72–73. For Evliya Çelebi, these were just “ciphers” (*rumûz u künûz*: Evliya Çelebi, *Evliyâ Çelebi seyahatnâmesi, I. Kitap: Topkapı Sarayı Kütüphanesi Bağdat 304 numaralı yazmanın tran-*

talismanic scriptures: for instance, an inscription in Alexandria, written by Yu'ammir b. Shaddād, the alleged founder of the city (before Iskender/Alexander who repaired it) and builder of the pyramids, is written in Syriac (*Süryân dilince*) according to a late fourteenth-century cosmography;⁶⁰ in a slightly later specimen, we read of an inscription by the Prophet Suleyman written in Syriac.⁶¹

Another candidate as an alternative sacred language was Hebrew, due to its being the language of the sacred books of Torah and Zebur (Psalms). It seems that, contrary to the case of Syriac with its long prehistory in the Islamic tradition, this was more of an Ottoman peculiarity⁶² (Mustafa 'Āli's detailed account of Jewish history, based on a compilation of pre-Ottoman sources, hardly has any such reference).⁶³ One might even suggest a connection with the idea that the religion (*millet*) of Abraham was Islam, an idea that had Qurānic roots but seems to have been enhanced in sixteenth-century Ottoman catechisms (and fuelled a heated debate throughout the seventeenth century).⁶⁴ Thus, the late fifteenth-century *Saltukname* features an inscription in a faraway, mysterious land in Hebrew;⁶⁵ a mid-sixteenth century text prophesying future events by the science of letters speaks of a corpse which will be discovered with an

skripsiyonu – dizini, eds R. Dankoff, S. A. Kahraman and Y. Dağlı (Istanbul 2006), 29) or “strange and wondrous signs”: *Atmeydâni'ndaki gibi... acâyib hey'et-i garibeler ile âmâde alâyimâtlar var kim diller ile tâ'bir olunmaz* (Kahraman, Dağlı, and Dankoff, *Evlîyâ Çelebi seyahatnâmesi, X. Kitap*, 429; Dankoff, Tezcan, and Sheridan, *Ottoman Explorations of the Nile*, 233). For some medieval, totally un-esoteric accounts of the hieroglyphs, see M. Cooperson, “Al-Ma'mûn, the Pyramids and the Hieroglyphs”, in J. Nawas (ed.), *Abbasid Studies II. Occasional Papers of the School of Abbasid Studies. Leuven, 28 June – 1 July 2004* (Leuven – Paris – Walpole 2010), 165–190, esp. 179–187.

60 Ş. B. Al, “Acâ'ibü'l-mahlûkât (35.–70. varak) (Giriş, metin, inceleme, dizin – Sözlük)”, unpublished MA thesis, Sakarya University, 2010, 48/64b.

61 Anonymous, *Tercüme-i Acâibü'l-mahlûkat*, ed. Sarıkaya, 171.

62 Of course, this idea was long glorified in Hebrew, European and Syriac environments. On the latter see Minov, “The Cave of Treasures and the Formation of Syriac Christian Identity”, 165–171.

63 Āli, *Künhü'l-abbâr. I. Rükün*, eds Donuk and Örs, 1: 723–786. The only reference to Hebrew is the note that Buhtunnaşr/Nebuchadnezzar's name means “Mercury” in Hebrew (*ibid.*, 767; but this is just a “custom of the Jewish tribe”: *ibid.*, 783).

64 N. Shafir, “Vernacular Legalism in the Ottoman Empire: Confession, Law, and Popular Politics in the Debate over the ‘Religion of Abraham (*millet-i İbrâhîm*)””, *Islamic Law and Society*, 28 (2021), 32–75.

65 Rûmî, *Saltuk-nâme*, ed. Akalın, 1: 131.

inscription in Hebrew on its forehead, stating that this was a prophet of the Israelites;⁶⁶ and a polemic text against Judaism, written in the late fifteenth century by a Jewish convert, mentions Jewish *gematria* calculations and inverts it, claiming that the numerical value of a Biblical expression (in Hebrew, *bi-me'od me'od* meaning “very much”) is the equivalent of the name of the Prophet Muhammad.⁶⁷ And if this reference might be attributed to the origin and aim of this particular text, Evliya Çelebi's references in the late seventeenth century are much more impressive and difficult to interpret. He asserts that “the scriptures that were revealed by God to Abraham were all in Hebrew, which is the language of truth (*lisân-ı hak*)”⁶⁸ and, what is perhaps more, he links Hebrew with the major esoteric figure of İdrîs/Hermes. İdrîs, according to Evliya, is supposed to have spoken Hebrew, as this was the language of the Egyptians until King K̄ıbtîm, and Hermes (Hürmüs) is said to mean Shaikh (“old man”) in Hebrew.⁶⁹

Persian also carried its sacred connotations. The debate regarding Persian as a sacred language of Islam dates back to the eighth century; by the tenth, eleventh and twelfth centuries, a lively body of literature had developed focusing on the legitimacy of its liturgical use.⁷⁰ These connotations became perhaps even more marked after Feyzullah Astarabadî's Hurufism, which left visible traces in Ottoman culture. The Hurufi doctrine added the four Persian letters (*pa, ça, ja, ga*) to the twenty-eight letters of the Arabic alphabet as portents of the divine speech. For instance, a rather obscure Rifa'î sheikh, Muhammed Fethül-Maârif (d. 1824/5), composed in 1778/9 a treatise heavily influenced by Fazlullah's Hurufism, although he never mentions his name; he explains that 32 letters

66 A. Özgül, “İlyas b. İsa-yı Saruhânî'nin ‘Rumûzü'l-künûz’ adlı eserin transkripsiyonu ve değerlendirilmesi”, unpublished M.A. thesis, Kırıkkale University, 2004, 74/39a.

67 C. Adang, “Guided to Islam by the Torah: The *Risâla al-hâdiya* by ‘Abd al-Salâm al-Muhtadî al-Muhammadi”, in C. Adang and S. Schmidtke (eds), *Contacts and Controversies Between Muslims, Jews and Christians in the Ottoman Empire and Pre-Modern Iran* (Würzburg 2010), 57–72 at 70–71.

68 Dankoff, *From Mahmud Kaşgari*, 284.

69 Dankoff, *An Ottoman Mentality*, 177. Cf. Kahraman, Dağlı and Dankoff, *Evliyâ Çelebi seyahatnâmesi, X. Kitap*, 430, 462, 470; Dankoff, Tezcan, and Sheridan, *Ottoman Explorations of the Nile*, 234, 287, 293. On king K̄ıbtîm see e.g. Âlî, *Künhü'l-abbâr. 1. Rükün*, eds Donuk and Örs, 1: 601.

70 M. A. Amir-Moezzi, “Le persan, seconde langue sacrée de l'islam. Quelques notes brèves”, in Noël ed., *Hiéroglossie I*, 169–182.

were contained in the language spoken by Adam, 22 by Moses, 24 by Jesus, 28 (plus lam-elif) by Muhammad. The letters sent to Adam were twenty-nine (Arabic plus lam-elif), and the 29th (lam-elif) corresponds to the four Persian letters (*pa, ça, ja, ga*) reaching thus the number of 32.⁷¹ Fethü'l-Maârif claims that he collected wisdom from:

external knowledge, the art of *cifr*, the knowledge of divine properties, magic/simya, the sharia [and so on]; some were written in Arabic, some in Turkish, some in Syriac...⁷²

The influence of the Hurufis is sometimes evident even in non-Hurufi works. For instance, in Ahmed Bîcân's late-fifteenth century description of language, letters are identified with the sounds the human tongue is capable of producing, and these are the Arabic letters; but, somehow awkwardly, a passing mention is made of the Persian letters: "and this tongue can produce thirty two or twenty eight letters".⁷³

Beyond even the Hurufi influence, Persian is present in several cases within an esoteric or occultist context. In a manual for conjuring angels and jinn, composed by Uzun Firdevsî in 1478, the talismanic invocations are all written in Arabic, but one particular invocation is in Persian; interestingly, it may be the only one in the treatise named *efsun* rather than *tesbih* or *duâ*.⁷⁴ Persian is also spoken by a jinn in an intriguing story of possession, narrated by the poet Mustafa b. Mehmed Cinani in 1590. As the story takes place in Egypt, the exorcist cannot understand the jinn's words and is forced to use an interpreter:

71 H. Birgören, "Muhammed Fethü'l-maârif'in mensur Vahdetnâmesi. İnceleme – tenkitli metin", unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Sakarya University, 2017, 717/85a (*Hağk Teâlâ indirmedî âdem üzerine, illâ bu yigirmi tokuz hurûfu indirdi*), 771/139b, 785/153b and passim.

72 Birgören, "Muhammed Fethü'l-maârif'in mensur Vahdetnâmesi", 784/152b: *Bu ma'ârifet ve cemî-i abkâm üzere, bu muhâbbet ile tamâm-ı ma'ârifet-i şan'at-ı zâhîrî, kimisi ma'ârifet-i şan'at-ı cifr ve kimisi ma'ârifet-i havâss-ı teshîr-i rûhânî ve simyâ ve kimi şerî'at ve kimi târîkat ve kimi ma'ârifetullâh ve kimi haqîkati bildirerek te'lif olunur. Kimisi Arabî ve kimi Türkî lisân üzere ve kimi Süryânî, her birisi bir nev'â ve her birine bir gayrı isim bahş idüp tesmiye olunmuşdır.*

73 Beyazıt, "Ahmed Bîcân'in 'Müntehâ' isimli Fusûs tercümesi", 241: *ve bu lisândan zâbir olan otuz iki yâbûd yirmi sekiz harftir.*

74 F. Büyükkarcı (ed.), *Firdevsî-i Tavîl and his Dâ'vet-nâme: Interpretation, Transcription, Index, Facsimile and Microfiche* (Harvard 1995), 168.

“But the jinn who loves the concubine is Persian; it only speaks Persian! Since the exorcist is an Arab, he does not know Persian. This is why we summoned you, so that you translate the Persian words told by the jinn and tell the exorcist in Arabic. By God, you know both languages”. “Sure” I said. So I turned to the jinn and asked it in Arabic, *ayyuha l-jinn, li-ayy shay tasra badha* [!] *l-jariyatahu ta'kbudhuba*, which means “O jinn, why are you possessing and torturing this concubine?”. The jinn talked from inside the concubine’s body and with a high-pitched voice said: *Az-an sabab ki dost midaram o-ra*, that is “I love her, this is why I am possessing her”. Then, instructed by the exorcist, I said: “Leave this concubine or else the exorcist will punish you severely”. The jinn said: *Na-tavanam kardan yira ki basi dost midaram*, that is, “I love her a lot; I am unable to leave her”. Then, under the exorcist’s orders, they tied the concubine’s feet and started to beat her soles with a thin stick. The jinn, from inside her, cried out: *mazan mazan*, which means “don’t hit, don’t hit”.⁷⁵

Once again the strongest attribution of divine features to Persian comes from the generous Evliya. He adds Persian to the languages of Paradise, which returned to earth along with Arabic at the time of Ishmael, and cites a pertinent hadith. Notably, in order to underscore this connection Evliya couples Persian not with Arabic but with Hebrew. Immediately after claiming that Hebrew is the “language of truth”, in which God spoke to Abraham, he states that:

some words in it agree with Persian, and certain commentators assert that Persian is Hebrew... And the Prophet spoke Persian... It is a refined and elegant language, and, since it has common features with Hebrew, must be quite ancient.⁷⁶

Evliya also refers elsewhere to an alleged ban of Persian books by Ebu’su’ud Efendi, miraculously repelled by İbrâhim Gülşenî (d. 1534).⁷⁷

Actually, these references are concerned with a lively debate in the seventeenth-century Ottoman Empire, where the reverence of the Mevlevî dervishes for Mevlana’s *Mesnevî* as a sacred text clashed with the so-called Sunna-minded trend usually identified with the Kadızadeli movement. As demonstrated by Aslıhan Gürbüz, such discussions should be viewed in the context of an anti-Persianate current at the turn of the seventeenth century, targeting mainly the Mevlevî tradition, with its “recognition of the diversity of authoritative Is-

75 O. Ünlü (ed.), *Cinâni: Bedâyiü’l-âsâr* (Harvard 2009), 2: 335–336.

76 Dankoff, *From Mahmud Kaşgari*, 284.

77 Gürbüz, “Bilingual Heaven”, 215.

lamic discourses” and its “positive propensity towards innovations”.⁷⁸ Undoubtedly, the claim that Persian was spoken in paradise reflects an old debate about languages of Heaven and Hell. The debate was centred on a disputed hadith, according to which Arabic (or, according to some, Syriac) will be spoken in Paradise and Persian in Hell. Ibn Taymiyya had refuted explicitly this idea, stating that there is no evidence for either statement,⁷⁹ and no less authoritative a şeyhülislam than Kemâlpaşazâde (d. 1534) had asserted that Persian, together with Arabic, constituted one of the languages of Heaven.⁸⁰ However, it seems that this debate had resurrected in Ottoman circles by the seventeenth century, when the Mevlevî sheikh İsmâ‘îl ‘Ankaravî (d. 1631) felt compelled to answer Kadızadeli preachers who claimed that Persian was the language of Hell (in their effort to repel the use of Persian verse as sacred text to be used in prayers etc.).⁸¹ In the early eighteenth century, the şeyhülislam Yenişehirli Abdullah Efendi (in office 1718–1730) had to answer such a question, ascertaining that both languages were spoken in Paradise.⁸² It is interesting to see İsmâ‘îl Hakkî Bursevî’s late seventeenth-century view on this topic: after relating that his sheikh, Atpazarî Seyyid ‘Osmân, had never learnt Persian (*fârisî*) and that he had stated that the Arab language was bestowed upon the people of Paradise, while Persian (*‘ajamî*) was given to the people of Hell, he proceeds to an elaborate distinction between these two Arabic words. “*Fârisî*” is a part of the “*Ajamî*” languages, meaning all non-Arabic languages. God added Persian/*fârisî* to Arabic, as attested by the number of Persian letters (32 letters correspond to the number of teeth, while 28 letters—the Arabic alphabet—to the number of the joints of fingers in both hands), and thus Persian is also a language of Par-

78 Ibid., 217 and passim.

79 See <https://abdurrahman.org/2014/10/07/the-language-of-the-people-of-paradise-imam-ibn-taymiyyah/> citing *Majmû‘ fatawa* 4/300–301; see the fetva in <https://islamqa.info/en/answers/83262/is-arabic-the-language-of-the-people-of-paradise>. His more or less contemporary Ibn Kathir (d. 1373) had postulated that although those who enter the paradise will speak Arabic, the language of the day of Qiyama would be Syriac: <https://www.islamweb.net/ar/fatwa/4563/> (all links accessed in July 2021).

80 J. Schmidt, “The Importance of Persian for Ottoman Literary Gentlemen: Two Turkish Treatises on Aspects of the Language by Kemal Pashazade (d. 1536)”; in H. Aynur et al. (eds), *Kitaplara vakfedilen bir ömre tuhfe: İsmail E. Erünsal’a armağan* (Istanbul 2014), 851–864; Gürbüz, “Bilingual Heaven”, 218.

81 Ibid., 221–225.

82 F. İZ, *Eski Türk edebiyatında nesir: XIV. Yüzyıldan XIX. Yüzyıl ortasına kadar yazmalardan seçilmiş metinler I* (Istanbul 1964), 58.

adise. God gave the Qur'an in Arabic so as to be understood by the Arabs, just like he had given the Torah in Hebrew and the Gospel in Syriac; Muhammad is even reported to have had spoken some Persian.⁸³

Aside from Syriac and Hebrew, Greek was imbued with connotations of ancient wisdom, if not of prophecy;⁸⁴ significantly, 'Ālī relates a tradition according to which Greek sages took this knowledge directly from Idrīs's tablets, where he had inscribed all rules and traditions to save them from the Great Flood.⁸⁵ This was the result of a long association of ancient Greece with tales of wisdom and occult sciences.⁸⁶ This conviction was revived by the final conquest of the last remnants of the Byzantine Empire during Mehmed II's reign: the Conqueror, who had likely attempted to master Greek as a prince (there is a notebook from his childhood, where one may find exercises in both the Greek and the Arabic alphabet),⁸⁷ maintained a thriving Greek scriptorium and commissioned translations from Greek to Arabic.⁸⁸ Roughly one third of the Greek

83 Bursevî, *Tamâmü'l-feyz*, eds Muslu and Namlı, 362–365 and facs. 828–832. Atpazarî, his mentor, had never learnt Persian because in his youth he had overheard some boatmen reciting Persian verses, and they are a perverted tribe (*ibid.*, 362). Cf. a discussion of the different names for the Persian language by Kemâlpaşazâde: Schmidt, “The Importance of Persian”, 860–862.

84 As an early example, one may cite the reference of the pseudo-Rükneddin cosmography to a stone inscription, excavated in Alexandria, which had a moral advice in “Greek” (the quote is in Arabic) and in “everybody’s script” (*Rumca yazmışlar... ve hem bu söz kamu kütübde yazılıdur*): Anonymous, *Tercüme-i Acâibül-mablûkat*, ed. Sarıkaya, 205.

85 Ālī, *Künhül-abbâr. 1. Rükün*, eds Donuk and Örs, 1: 557.

86 On the image of ancient Greece in pre-Ottoman Islam, see B. Lewis, “The Use by Muslim Historians of Non-Muslim Sources”, in B. Lewis and P. M. Holt (eds), *Historians of the Middle East* (London 1962), 183–84; M. Springberg-Hinsen, *Die Zeit vor dem Islam in arabischen Universalgeschichten des 9. bis 12. Jahrhunderts* (Würzburg – Altenberge 1989); J. N. Mattock, “Islam”, in K. J. Dover (ed.), *Perceptions of the Ancient Greeks* (Oxford – Cambridge 1992), 79–99; R. Mottahedeh, “Some Islamic Views of the Pre-Islamic Past”, *Harvard Middle Eastern and Islamic Review*, 1/1 (1994), 17–26; for the Safavid culture, M. Terrier, “La représentation de la sagesse grecque comme discours et mode de vie chez les philosophes šī'ites de l'Iran safavide (XIe/XVIIe siècle)”, *Studia graeco-arabica*, 5 (2015), 299–320. Cf. the survey by M. Bonner and G. Hagen, “Muslim Accounts of the *Dâr al-harb*”, in R. Irwin (ed.), *The New Cambridge History of Islam*, vol. 4: *Islamic Cultures and Societies to the End of the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge 2010), 474–94.

87 S. Ünver (ed.), *Fatih'in çocukluk defteri* (Istanbul 1961 [2nd ed. 2014]).

88 Among the products of the scriptorium one may note dictionaries, grammar books, Arrian's history of Alexander, Homer's, Hesiod's and Pindar's texts and so forth. See J. Raby,

manuscripts produced by the scriptorium dealt with various aspects of esotericism: prophecies, grimoires (the Testament of Solomon), or the famous Byzantine texts on the antiquities of Constantinople. Furthermore, among these translations, which included geographical treatises and maps, one may find Georgios Gemistos or Pletho's (1355–1452) neo-Platonic and esoteric works (*Compendium Zoroastreorum et Platoniorum dogmatum*, and *Chaldaean Oracles*).⁸⁹ As Maria Mavroudi illustrated, these texts, presenting complex relationships among ancient Greek deities, planets, and the cosmos, were regarded as items related to theurgy, and the translator explicitly designates Pletho as a pagan and, tellingly, a Sabean. The translator's introduction goes as follows:

Within these pages [is] the translation of the remainder of the book by Gemistos the pagan (*al-wathani*), the Sabean (*al-Sābi*), on his religion. In it he collected the doctrine of the religion of the ancients regarding idol worship (*ʿibādat al-aṣnām*), after it disappeared... The entire book was thrown to the fire and burnt out of fear that the ordinary people (*al-ʿawāmm*) will be led astray by the propagation of his doctrine.⁹⁰

The reputation of Byzantine scholarship did not survive Mehmed's reign, it

“Mehmed the Conqueror's Greek Scriptorium”, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 37 (1983), 15–34; D. Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture: The Graeco-Arabic Translation Movement in Baghdad and Early ʿAbbāsid Society (2nd–4th/8th–10th c.)* (London – New York 1998), 174ff.

89 M. Mavroudi, “Translators from Greek into Arabic at the court of Mehmet the Conqueror”, in A. Ödekan, N. Necipoğlu and E. Akyürek (eds), *The Byzantine Court: Source of Power and Culture. Papers from the Second International Sevgi Gönül Byzantine Studies Symposium, Istanbul, 21–23 June 2010* (Istanbul 2013), 195–207; Eadem, “Pletho as Subversive and His Reception in the Islamic World”, in D. Angelov and M. Saxby (eds), *Power and Subversion in Byzantium* (Farnham 2013), 177–204; J. Nicolet and M. Tardieu, “Pletho Arabicus. Identification et contenu du manuscrit arabe d'Istanbul”, *Topkapı Serâi, Ahmet III 1896*, *Journal Asiatique*, 268 (1980), 35–57. Pletho himself, apart from his neo-Platonism, might have been influenced by both al-Suhrawardī and the Jewish interpretation of Averroes through his apprentice with the Jewish scholar Elissaios (see Mavroudi, “Pletho as Subversive”).

90 Mavroudi, “Pletho as Subversive”, 185; cf. N. Gardiner, “Books on Occult Sciences”, in 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), 1:735–765 at 747. On Greek texts in the palace library, including stories from Ancient Greek literature, see also G. Necipoğlu, “The Spatial Organization of Knowledge in the Ottoman Palace Library: An Encyclopedic Collection and Its Inventory”, in *ibid.*, 1–77 at 54–55.

seems (although one can find a reference to Byzantine approaches to earthquakes in an early-sixteenth treatise on talismans, probably composed by the seyhülislam Ibn Kemāl).⁹¹ However, the position of Greek as a privileged language of wisdom persisted throughout the Ottoman times. Again according to Evliya:

It was heard from the wise men of King Goliath during the time of the prophet David, and became well-known during the reign of Jeroboam the son of the prophet Solomon. During the time of the prophets Zachariah and John (the Baptist) and Jesus... everyone spoke Greek, so God revealed the gospel to Jesus in that language.⁹²



Thus, despite the elevated place of Arabic in the hierarchy of languages and its privileged relationship with the divine, Ottomans were prepared to admit that the pluralism of human languages implied that multiple linguistic paths could lead to wisdom. Probably, however, this did not mean every path as a rule. What is striking, at a first glance, is the blatant absence of Turkish from almost all esoteric references concerning languages. Although Ottoman historiographers began sanctifying the Turkish origins of Osman's dynasty, citing various genealogies that went up to Noah's sons or connected ancient Turkic rulers with prophets,⁹³ Ottoman Turkish continued to be the common vernacular and, as such, lacked the exoticism required for a language to be sanctified as having some special connection with the mystical. It goes without saying that the same applies for the other living languages spoken across the empire: amongst contemporary (spoken) Greek, Albanian, Armenian, the Slavic languages, none is mentioned as having any special powers or meanings. Nevertheless, in treatises composed in the vernacular, such as Ibn 'Īsā Saruḥānī's *Ḳavā'id-i teshīrāt*, where the science of letters is used to foresee the future through one's name, we may see words of Turkish origin (such as Ağa or Pasha) considered as essential parts

91 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 (2017), 66–88 at 79–80.

92 Dankoff, *From Mahmud Kahsgari*, 286.

93 See Sariyannis, *A History of Ottoman Political Thought*, 60–62.

of names and thus included in the calculations.⁹⁴ The sheikh Ibrahim Gülşeni, according to his late sixteenth-century biography, takes pride of his ancestor Oğuz, supposed to “have laid down the Turkish language” (*Oğuz, vâzî‘-i lisân-ı Türkdür*);⁹⁵ the translator of Bisṭāmī’s *Fawā’ih al-miskīyya* in 1570 claims that he had the text put off the coarse garb of Arabic and invested it with the brocade of Rum (*ḳabā-yı ‘Arabī geydirüp dībā-i Rūmı geydiresin*).⁹⁶ Evliya maintains that he had seen Turkish inscriptions, in the fortress of Strumica, that were two thousand years old, and compares them to Turkish invocations of prophets in Crimea. He corroborates the antiquity of the Turkish language with a story concerning the family of Hûşeng Şâh speaking Turkish in Noah’s ark; when some Egyptian magicians asked Noah about this language, he answered that people speaking it were bound to conquer the earth.⁹⁷ Finally, in İsmâ‘îl Hâḳḳı Bursevî’s biography of Atpazarî Seyyid ‘Oşmân, we read that Yûnus Emre had a share in the “sealing” of prophecy (*ḥatamiyya*), because he expressed his knowledge in Turkish, something nobody had done before him.⁹⁸

Finally, I have found no references to languages such as Indian or Chinese (although there is a strong tradition associating parts of occult knowledge to

94 Kaçar, “İbn-i İsa’nın *Ḳavâ‘id-i teşhîrât*”, 115–116, 145 (where Idris attributes numbers to letters).

95 M. Koç and E. Tanrıverdi (eds), *Muhyî-i Gülşeni* (ö. 1604): *Menâkıb-ı İbrâhim-i Gülşeni (inceleme – metin)* (Istanbul 2014), 43.

96 Yağmur, “Terceme-i kitâb-ı fevâ’ihü’l-miskīyye”, 13/3a.

97 Evliya Çelebi, *Evlîyâ Çelebi seyahatnâmesi, VIII. Kitap: Topkapı Sarayı Kütüphanesi Bağdat 308 numaralı yazmanın transkripsiyonu – dizini*, eds S. A. Kahraman, Y. Dağlı and R. Dankoff (Istanbul 2003), 335/374a–374b.

98 Bursevî, *Tamâmü’l-feyz*, eds. Muslu and Namlı, 153 and facs. 1088–1089. On the meaning of “sealing” and the way Bursevî tried to impose this concept without denying the dogma of Muhammad being the seal of prophets, see his lengthy discussion in *ibid.*, 139–142. He makes a parallel with the moon: the manifestation of the divine Truth in Muhammad was like the full moon, but then it started to diminish and had again minor manifestations (as minor manifestations were those in Abraham etc.). On Atpazarî Seyyid ‘Oşmân’s appreciation of Yûnus Emre’s poetry see also *ibid.*, 358.

India);⁹⁹ the reader will recall here 'Ālī's perhaps unique reference to Coptic as a divinely inspired language.¹⁰⁰

In this context, it would be an interesting path to explore in what degree non-Muslim esoteric traditions incorporated the Arabic-based vocabulary and formulas of Ottoman grimoires and treatises. Unfortunately, very little is known about Greek, Slavic, Jewish or Armenian esotericism and occultism during the Ottoman period. The few known vernacular Greek specimens of magic have barely attracted scholarly interest. A compilation of magical recipes, known as the Vernardakis Codex (from the name of the family that owned the manuscript) and copied in ca. 1890 from an apparently much earlier text (the title "Introduction to the olden magic" appears in the middle of the manuscript), uses Arabic terms like *vefk* (βεύκι, βεύκος: magic square), *du'ā* (τουβάς: prayer), *talsim* (τελεσέμια: talismans), *harf* (χαρφία: letters) or *esmā* (εσμάδες: the names of God). Prayers and incantations in corrupted Arabic or Turkish are also abundant, often seemingly written after dictation by a Turkish-speaking informant: for instance, the name of the object of an incantation is to be inserted under the term *filan bin filan* (φιλάν πήν φιλάν, "So-and-so son of So-and-so"). In other places, Turkish expressions inserted within the Greek text point to a bilingual author (μουχαπέτ' ητζούν [muhabbet için] γράψε τα καθώς ώδε: "for love, write the following...").¹⁰¹ Magic squares have Arabic letters or numerals (copied ver-

99 See Coulon, *La Magie en terre d'islam*, 104–110; idem, "The Kitāb Sharāsīm al-Hindiyya and Medieval Islamic Occult Sciences", in Saif, Leoni, Melvin-Koushki and Yahya (eds), *Islamicate Occult Sciences*, 317–379. Evliya claims that several African languages, including *lisān-i Dehlevī* which might translated as the language of Delhi (but Dankoff is most probably right noting that it refers to the Dahlak islands in the Red Sea, speaking a language of the Ethiopic group), are similar to Hebrew: Dankoff, *An Ottoman Mentality*, 180; Kahraman, Dağlı, and Dankoff, *Evlīyā Çelebi seyahatnâmesi, X. Kitap*, 470. Ālī's lengthy descriptions of China and India contain no references to any esoteric meaning of their languages: Ālī, *Künhū'l-abbār. 1. Rükün*, eds Donuk and Örs, 1: 662–723.

100 Ibid., 1: 601.

101 M. Papathomopoulos (ed.), *Βερναρδάκειος μαγικός κώδικας. Εισαγωγήον της Μαγείας της πάλαι ποτέ* [Vernardakis magical codex. Introduction to the olden magic], with commentary by M. Varvounis (Athens 2006), 43–44 and *passim*. It is interesting that both the introduction and comments focus on similarities of the text with the Ancient Greek tradition or modern Greek folklore, almost ignoring the heavy influence of Islamicate magic. On the use of various languages in magic literature cf. also V. Menaldi, "One Grimoire, Many Cultures: A Study of Language Use and Cross-Cultural Contact in a 16th Century *Aljamiado* Manu-

batim from an Ottoman Turkish or Arabic original) in their cells.¹⁰² In some cases, the author explicitly refers to prayers and talismans used by “Turks or Arabs” or even “Indians” (*κάλεσμα των χιντλήδων*).¹⁰³ On the other hand, the text also contains elements clearly borrowed from the Western tradition of ritual magic.¹⁰⁴ The manuscript also contains many talismanic inscriptions in various magical alphabets, including scripts of the planets. In sum, the Vernardakis Codex is a fascinating example of cultural syncretism, incorporating influences from all the array of the complex cultural habitat of the Ottoman Empire.

Learned texts are even less studied;¹⁰⁵ for one thing, we know that Panayiotis Nicousios or Mamonas (d. 1673), the Grand Dragoman of Köprülüzade Fazıl Ahmed Pasha, was competent in Hebrew and even wrote a short note interpreting the Tetragrammaton with Kabbalistic methods as proving the doctrine of the Trinity; interestingly, he also had correspondence with Athanasius Kircher, the famous Jesuit scholar, sending him drawings of the hieroglyphics in the Istanbul hippodrome obelisk.¹⁰⁶

3. Languages and alphabets

The sacredness and antiquity of Syriac or Hebrew set aside, practitioners of Ottoman occult sciences barely used any other languages than Arabic—in contrast to Christian esotericism that often used “exotic” or “sacred” languages, namely Arabic or Persian (or pseudo-Arabic/Persian) in the first case and

script”, in L. L. Baralt and R. Mami (eds), *Mélanges Abdejelil Temini: En hommage à l'œuvre réalisée en moriscologie* (Tunis 2017), 351–383.

102 Papathomopoulos (ed.), *Βερναρδάκειος μαγικός κώδικας*, 29, 37–38. There is also a magic square filled with European numerals: *ibid.*, 34.

103 *Ibid.*, 181–182.

104 Take for example the *sator arepo* square: *Ibid.*, 178; words in Latin alphabet also make occasional appearances (*ibid.*, 46, 224).

105 Mr. Markos Litinas is currently looking into Greek scholarly occultism in the context of his ongoing Ph.D. dissertation.

106 G. Koutzakiotis, *Attendre la fin du monde au XVII^e siècle. Le messie juif et le grand drogman*, trans. D. Morichon (Paris 2014), 121–193 and especially 171–172. Nicousios also uses his competence in Hebrew to refute Vānī Efendi's interpretation of Jesus Christ's exclamation on the crucifix, *Eli Eli lama sabachthani*: G. Koutzakiotis and M. Sariyannis, “Panagiotes Nikousios, ‘Dialogue of Panagiotes Nikousios with Vani Efendi, wise doctor of the Hagarenes’”, in D. Thomas and J. Chesworth (eds), *Christian-Muslim Relations. A Bibliographical History*, vol. 10: *Ottoman and Safavid Empires (1600–1700)* (Leiden 2017), 421–430.

Hebrew in the second, to create an effect of hidden knowledge and wisdom. İsmâ'il Hakkı Bursevî notes that the famous calligrapher Yâkût al-Musta'şimî destroyed Hârût and Mârût's magic with spells emanating from his script (*abta-la be-ʿazâʿimi kalamihî sihri Hârût wa Mârût*).¹⁰⁷ Even in works written in Ottoman Turkish (and, if we remain at a scholarly level of learned magic, these were far fewer than those written in Arabic), formulas for conjuring angels or jinn and phrases to be inscribed in manuscripts were usually in Arabic; the sole instance of a Persian conjuring we observed above in Uzun Firdevsî's treatise is clearly an exception.

Still, one can see glimpses of linguistic exoticism in Islamic occultist texts as well: alphabets—not so much foreign alphabets as imagined ones.¹⁰⁸ Magic alphabets, usually following the pattern of adding small circles to shapes derived from known letters (known as *caractères à lunettes*), had been used in grimoires and manuals even since Hellenistic times. As they had been relied on extensively by al-Būnī, the main model for Ottoman literature about magic through al-Biṣṭāmī's works, such alphabets make their appearance in Ottoman manuals of talismanic (although quite rarely, it seems, in comparison to the use of Arabic letters proper),¹⁰⁹ until even the late Ottoman period.¹¹⁰

Such magic letters were supposed to be associated with jinn or angels and other spiritual entities; but another tradition placed esoteric alphabets or scripts within a line of human creations, together with the alphabets of known peoples and cultures. This tradition arguably began with the famous “Long-desired Fulfilled Knowledge of the Signs of Alphabets” or *Shawq al-mustahām fi maʿrifat rumūz al-aqlām*, long misattributed to the obscure tenth-century author Ibn Wahshiyya,¹¹¹ a highly original and interesting treatise on various alphabets (in-

107 Bursevî, *Tamâmü'l-feyz*, eds. Muslu and Namlı, 381 and facs. 808. On the calligrapher see *EP*, s.v. “Yâkût al-Musta'şimî” (Sheila R. Canby); *TDVİA*, s.v. “Yâkût el-Müsta'şimî” (Muhittin Serin).

108 On the uses of the alphabet in general see J. Drucker, *The Alphanumeric Labyrinth: The Letters in History and Imagination* (London 1995) and esp., for uses in magic practices, 65–69.

109 See for instance a collection of prayers and talismans in Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, MS turc 5, f. 39v; Büyükkarcı (ed.), *Firdevsî-i Tavil and his Da'vet-nâme*, passim.

110 See e.g. A. Uygun, “Seyyid Süleyman el-Hüseynî'nin *Kenzül-havâs* kitabındaki dua ve büyü motifleri”, unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Süleyman Demirel University, 2013, 106–110, 312.

111 On the grounds most modern scholars argue that this is a misattribution, see J. Hämeen-Anttila, *The Last Pagans of Iraq: Ibn Wahshiyya and his Nabatean Agriculture* (Leiden

cluding Egyptian hieroglyphic) with references to their uses for magic purposes. In Ottoman times, al-Biṣṭāmī also discussed alphabets, in both a kind of universal history that he authored (*Nazm al-sulūk fi musāmarat al-mulūk*), and in a work specifically dedicated to the secrets of scripts (*Mabāhij al-a'lām fi manāhij al-aqlām mim mā alqāhu rasūl al-ḥikma min khazā'in al-raḥma*): he described a number of scripts noting their correspondences to prophets, planets and signs of the zodiac (for instance, Chinese alphabet was ascribed to Japheth, Hebrew to Moses, or Armenian to Daniel), wrote on (in Noah Gardiner's words) "the structural identity of the primordial Syriac script of Adam and the Arabic script" (in *Nazm al-sulūk*; in *Mabāhij al-a'lām*, al-Biṣṭāmī attributes the invention of the Syriac alphabet to Idrīs) and also dealt with cipher alphabets, attributed to sages such as Hermes or Dioscorides. As Gardiner notes, the idea that such creations are regulated by the stars "could also take to imply that lettrism is a discipline not limited to the Arabic language and/or script but rather one that applies to all languages";¹¹² and Guy Burak stresses the similarity to the use of *jafr* divinatory techniques on the "Syriac" symbols found on the Istanbul obelisk.¹¹³

Such examinations of the various alphabets belong to a long and as yet unexplored line of treatises; and we know too little to determine whether they

2006), 21 fn 45; I. Toral-Niehoff and A. Sundermeyer, "Going Egyptian in Medieval Arabic Culture: The Long-Desired Fulfilled Knowledge of Occult Alphabets by Pseudo-Ibn Wahshiyya", in N. El-Bizri and E. Orthmann (eds), *The Occult Sciences in Pre-modern Islamic Cultures* (Beirut 2018), 249–264 at 250–252. Pseudo-Ibn Wahshiyya's text had been edited and translated by J. Hammer (ed.), *Ancient Alphabets and Hieroglyphic Characters Explained; With an Account of the Egyptian Priests, Their Classes, Initiation, and Sacrifices, in the Arabic Language by Ahmad bin Abubekr bin Wahshih* (London 1806). Cf. also Coulon, *La Magie en terre d'islam*, 127–134; Drucker, *The Alphanumeric Labyrinth*, 123–125, focusing on the highly interesting relations of these alphabets with scripts used in the Western medieval tradition.

112 N. Gardiner, "Lettrism and History in 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Biṣṭāmī's *Nazm al-sulūk fi musāmarat al-mulūk*", in Saif, Leoni et al. (eds), *Islamicate Occult Sciences*, 230–266 at 237–238. See also the summary description of this chapter (in Turkish) in R. Karaman, "Abdurrahman Bistāmī'nin *Nazmü's-sülük fi müsāmereti'l-mülük* adlı eseri ve Osmanlı tarih yazımındaki yeri", unpublished M.A. thesis, Bursa Uludağ University, 2019, 42–43. In another point, however, al-Biṣṭāmī makes the usual claim that it was Idrīs or Hermes who invented writing (Yağmur, "Terceme-i kitāb-ı fevā'ihü'l-miskiyye", 41/26b) and gives a list of alphabets with no celestial correspondences or esoteric nuances (*ibid.*, 104–107/79a–81a).

113 G. Burak, "Reading the Talismanic Compound with 'Abd al-Raḥman al-Biṣṭāmī: Materiality and "Calligraphy" in the Inventory of Sultan Beyazid II's Palace Library", forthcoming in *Muqarnas*.

were also an established genre of Ottoman letters. The secret and magic alphabets are indeed mentioned in a work on calligraphers by Mustafa 'Ālī (d. 1600), *Menākib-i hüner-verān*. 'Ālī enumerates such scripts or, rather, alphabets (among eighteen scripts altogether, including Greek and Slavic) as follows:

The third is the *tabi'i* [natural] script. It is this script that the masters of miniature writing (*ashāb-i ufāk*), [that is] talisman [my correction: magic square, *veffāq*] writers and other astronomer-astrologers have been using. The fourth one is the script of Hermes the philosopher. He is the revered prophet known as Armiya [Uriyā'] the First¹¹⁴ [or], according to some, the Prophet Idrīs [Enoch]. This was probably the earliest script. The fifth [is] the *qalfaṭīnī* (*qalaṭīnī*, *qalaqṭīnī*?) script. The sixth is the script of philosophers (*qalem-i hukemā*). The seventh is the enigmatic script (*qalem-i esrār*). The eighth is the hidden script (*qalem-i meknūn*). The ninth is the sign script (*qalem-i işāre*). The tenth is the Syriac script (*qalem-i Süryānī*). The eleventh is clay writing (*qalem-i fatīri*). The twelfth is the script of Joseph the soothsayer...¹¹⁵

'Ālī, however, does not give examples as al-Biṣṭāmī did. I am not aware of any other Ottoman list of such secret alphabets; but a noteworthy fact is that all (or almost all) extant manuscripts of pseudo-Ibn Wahshiyya's *Shawq al-mustahām* were copied in the latter half of the eighteenth century.¹¹⁶ Although by no means was the text unknown in pre-Ottoman times, one is tempted to suggest that the popularity of this treatise is very much an Ottoman phenomenon (perhaps linked to the revival of an interest in antiquarianism)¹¹⁷ and even—but

114 The editor translates Armiya and interprets the name as Jeremiah, but the transcription correctly has *Evriyā'-i evvel* (see also facs., f. 15a). Yet, in his *Künhül-abbār* 'Ālī explains that the first Evriyā'/Uriyā' was Seth, the second Kādīmūn-ı Mıṣrī and the third Idrīs: Ālī, *Künhül-abbār*. 1. *Rükün*, eds Donuk and Örs, 1: 514–515; cf. also *ibid.*, 519 on Idrīs.

115 Quoted in Burak, “Reading the Talismanic Compound”, from 'Ālī, *Mustafa 'Ālī's Epic Deeds of Artists*, ed. Akın-Kıvanç, 171–172 (=298–299).

116 Toral-Niehoff and Sundermeyer, “Going Egyptian in Medieval Arabic Culture”, 254–257. Another manuscript is mentioned in Hämeen-Anttila, *The Last Pagans of Iraq*, 22 fn. 45 without a date of copying.

117 On Ottoman antiquarianism see B. Anderson, “‘An Alternative Discourse’: Local Interpreters of Antiquities in the Ottoman Empire”, *Journal of Field Archaeology*, 40/4 (2015) 450–460; E. K. Fowden, “The Parthenon, Pericles and King Solomon: A Case Study of Ottoman Archaeological Imagination in Greece”, *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies*, 42/2 (2018), 261–274; E. Neumeier, “Spoils for the New Pyrrhus: Alternative Claims to Antiquity in Ottoman Greece”, *International Journal of Islamic Architecture*, 6/2 (2017) 311–337; eadem, “Rivaling Elgin: Ottoman Governors and Archaeological Agency in the

of course much more research is needed—that it might have been reworked in the Ottoman period: a reference to two schools of the followers of Hermes named *ishrāqīyyūn* and *mashshāʿūn*, which seems to be a later addition to *Shawq al-mustahām* manuscripts,¹¹⁸ has strong Illuminationist overtones and, all the more, of a tradition that began with al-Shahrazūri (d. after 1288). Indeed, while the contrast between the two schools is, of course, present all over al-Suhrawardi's work, their coexistence as two alternative schools of thought going back to the ancient times (with Hermes, Plato and others described as *ishrāqī*) does not seem to appear until the late thirteenth century, when al-Shahrazūri implies such a coupling, without mentioning the specific term;¹¹⁹ and this tradition seems to have been crystallized in the Ottoman times.¹²⁰

The Ottoman interest in ancient scripts is somehow obliquely attested in a strange passage from Evliya, who credits Idrīs with the invention of the Egyptian hieroglyphics, but also (in a markedly Ottoman touch) of the *siyakat* script:

The Siyakat script first appeared among the ancient Copts of Egypt. The first of mankind to take pen in hand was the prophet Idrīs who was tutored in writing by the angel Gabriel... But according to the Coptic history, the first script of the prophet Idrīs was the Siyakat script. In fact, when I was travelling in the Sudan from Egypt, I was told that the writing on the pillars—like the one set up in the hippodrome in Istanbul—that are in the vast ruined site called Rūmeyleti'l-Himal

Morea", in B. Anderson and F. Rojas (eds), *Antiquarianisms: Contact, Conflict, and Comparison* (Oxford 2017), 134–160; Ü. Rüstem, "Spolia and the Invocation of History in Eighteenth-Century Istanbul", in S. Yalman and I. Jevtić (eds), *Spolia Reincarnated: Afterlives of Objects, Materials, and Spaces in Anatolia from Antiquity to the Ottoman Era* (Istanbul 2018), 289–307.

118 Hammer (ed.), *Ancient Alphabets and Hieroglyphic Characters*, 100 (= [29]–[30] in the translation); Toral-Niehoff and Sundermeyer, "Going Egyptian in Medieval Arabic Culture", 258–259. The reference to *ishrāqīyyūn* is added on a marginal note in all surviving manuscripts (ibid., 257 fn. 42). As noted by Hämeen-Anttila (*The Last Pagans of Iraq*, 22 fn. 45), this calls for a reconsideration of the passage as the earliest reference to the term *ishrāq*.

119 L. W. C. van Lit, *The World of Image in Islamic Philosophy: Ibn Sīnā, Suhrawardī, Shahrazūri, and Beyond* (Edinburgh 2017), 95–96. The idea is also present in al-Jurjānī's (d. 1413) work: Arıcı, "Is it Possible to Speak of an Illuminationist Circle?", 14.

120 See e.g. Kurz, *Ways to Heaven*, 206–207, 216–230; Fowden, "The Parthenon, Pericles and King Solomon". For the popularity of Illuminationist philosophy in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, see Kurz, *Ways to Heaven*, 206–215; Arıcı, "Is it Possible to Speak of an Illuminationist Circle?"

in the province of Funjistan is all by the hand of the prophet Idrīs, and that it is all in *Siyakat* script.¹²¹

As far as I know, this is a unique allusion to *siyakat* as a hermetic alphabet. As demonstrated by Guy Burak, Kufic was often credited as having talismanic attributes; but Kufic was an old and revered script, associated with the very early Islamic times, whereas *siyakat* was a script clearly linked to everyday bureaucratic and especially financial practice.¹²² True, this was a famously difficult script to read, thus hermetic in the modern sense of the word, but it is still puzzling that an educated (even in Evliya's somehow haphazardly way) Ottoman would place it in such an esoteric context.

It is worthy of remarking that, whereas al-Biṣṭāmī and his predecessors attributed magic qualities to such ancient alphabets, later generations preferred to see them in a more antiquarian way. When describing the series of alphabets that we saw above, 'Ālī explicitly invests these alphabets with esoteric uses, but only in the strict sense of hiding the truth from the unworthy:

[S]ages of mysticism (*ʿilm-i rūḥānī ʿālimleri*), the chosen men among the learned of the West, enchanters and penmen of various nations who are engaged in astrology, [the composing of] talismans, and in similar esoteric sciences (*finūn-i ḥafiyye*), adopted certain other scripts that they preferred [to use]. And with those scripts, they safeguarded the noble symbols of those sciences from unworthy persons. So much so that there were some who, by writing a talisman in three or four [different] scripts in order to make it seem confusing and contradictory, hid its secret meaning like a secret treasure protected by a spell.¹²³

Indeed, further along in this discussion he ties writing with astrology and geomancy; but again this link has no intrinsic occult value, it is just a *topos* highlighting the fact that such sciences need to be written down: “the explanation or demonstration... is not possible without writing... when [signs of geomancy

121 Dankoff, *An Ottoman Mentality*, 177. On Egyptian antiquities in the (pre-Ottoman) Islamic imaginary see the detailed study by J.C. Ducène, “Les vestiges de l’Égypte pharaonique chez les auteurs arabes. Entre relecture et imagination”, in *Curiosité d’Égypte. Entre quête de soi et découverte de l’autre, de l’Antiquité à l’époque contemporaine* (Paris – Genève 2020), 189–221.

122 See *EP*, s.v. “Siyākat” (C. Heywood).

123 'Ālī, *Mustafa 'Ālī's Epic Deeds of Artists*, ed. Akın-Kıvanç, 170 (=298).

started to be] drawn on paper, the need for the art of [sand]writing was eliminated".¹²⁴ The notion that wisdom should be concealed from the masses by using symbolic language or secret alphabets is not unique to 'Ālī nor, for that matter, to Ottoman thought:¹²⁵ a series of authors from Taşköprüzade to Kâtib Çelebi repeat the story of Aristotle wishing to "make wisdom so difficult to grasp that only those fit will comprehend it",¹²⁶ a story coming of course from the medieval Islamicate tradition.¹²⁷ But little more than a century after al-Bisṭāmī's highly occultized version of the same topic, it is striking to find such a down-to-earth description without any allusion to astral correspondences or lettrist thoughts.¹²⁸ Even in the fifteenth century, we are unable to find any reference to the divine origin and supernatural role of Arabic letters. For instance, in Molla Lutfi's (d. 1495) encyclopaedia, *al-Risala fi al-ulum al-shariyya wa al-arabiyya* (also known as *Mawzu'at al-ulum*), probably composed in 1481: men invented letters in order to communicate, he writes (although there is a comment on the

124 Ibid., 176–177 (=302–303).

125 On the idea that philosophy is not for the masses cf. F. Griffel, "The Project of Enlightenment in Islamic-Arabic Culture", in J. T. Robinson (ed.), *The Cultures of Maimonideanism: New Approaches to the History of Jewish Thought* (Leiden 2009), esp. 1–6. This idea was recurrent in authors as different as al-Ghazali and al-Farabi. Griffel argues that this "pedagogical pessimism" became dominant from the Late Antiquity on and attributes its rise to "the political experience in a highly hierarchical society" (ibid., 19); see also W. Eamon, *Science and the Secrets of Nature: Books of Secrets in Medieval and Early Modern Culture* (Princeton 1996), esp. 15–90.

126 Tashkupri-zadah, *Miftâh as-Sa'âdah wa misbâh as-siyâdah fi mawdu'ât al-ulûm*, by Ahmad b. Mustafa (*Tashkupri-zadah*), eds K. Bakry and A. Abu'l-Nur (Cairo 1968), 1:314–316; Kâtip Çelebi, *Kâtip Çelebi'den seçmeler*, ed. O. Ş. Gökyay (Istanbul 1968), 198–200; Koç, "XVII. Yüzyılın Ortasında Osmanlı Coğrafyası'ndan Antik Dönemlere Bir Bakış: Kâtip Çelebi'nin eserlerinden seçmeler", *Doğu Batı*, 10 (2007), 264–265; Nev'î Efendi, *Texts on Popular Learning*, 77–80 (=227–231); Kurz, *Ways to Heaven*, 206–248.

127 Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture*, 156–157; M. Mavroudi, "Translations from Greek into Latin and Arabic During the Middle Ages: Searching for the Classical Tradition", *Speculum*, 90/1 (2015) 28–59 at 40; H. Yücesoy, "Translation as Self-Consciousness: Ancient Sciences, Antediluvian Wisdom, and the 'Abbâsîd Translation Movement", *Journal of World History*, 20/4 (2009), 523–557 at 549–556.

128 Elsewhere, 'Ālī shows himself aware of lettrist methods, as when he interprets Murad III's behaviour according to the letters of his name: M. Sariyannis, "Knowledge and Control of the Future in Ottoman Thought", *Aca'ib: Occasional Papers on the Ottoman Perceptions of the Supernatural*, 1 (2020), 49–84 at 66.

use of the numeric values of Qurānic suras in order to predict the future).¹²⁹ The material one is able to work with is rather scarce (at least in the present state-of-the-art), but we can quote another example of antiquarianism from the early eighteenth century: in Şa'banzade Mehmed's (d. 1709) debate between the sword and the pen, the latter boasts that it is of "Indian and Ethiopian origin" and that it was raised "in the banks of the Nile and the Euphrates".¹³⁰ The absence of any reference to Idrīs/Hermes in this context is striking (we have to note, however, that such references are not included in the *topoi* of such debates in Ottoman literature, and even Uzun Firdevsī does not allude to Idrīs in his).¹³¹ Notably, Şa'banzade makes the same allusion as 'Ālī to the occult sciences, like geomancy, astrology and alchemy, as fields facilitated by the use of the pen.¹³²



To summarize, do we have any difference in Ottoman esotericism, compared with its Islamicate predecessors and models? In the present study I raised three points that may reflect Ottomans' peculiar position in the global context: a) the diversity of languages that can be considered sacred, b) the ancient scripts and alphabets that are attributed with "esoteric" qualities, c) a tendency for "de-occultisation" and antiquarianism starting from the late sixteenth century. Certainly, the presence of non-Arabic languages or words in esoteric procedures or in the understanding of the hereafter is no Ottoman novelty, although the inclusion of Hebrew to these languages may perhaps have been one. The same applies for the study of ancient alphabets; my hypothesis on a renewed interest for pseudo-Ibn Wahshiyya's *Shawq al-mustahām* still needs a lot of documentation to be established. One may see a real Ottoman novelty in the third point,

129 S. Arslan, "Molla Lutfi'nin ilimlerin tertibine dâir *er-Risâle fi'l-ulûmi's-şer'iyye ve'l-arabiyye* adlı eseri ve haşiyesi: metin – tercüme – değerlendirme", unpublished MA thesis, İstanbul University, 2012, 59–62 and 100–102. Molla Lutfi was also influenced by Illuminationist emphasis to knowledge as a hermeticist revelation: see Kurz, *Ways to Heaven*, 238–241.

130 E. Tuşalp Atiyas, "Eloquence in Context: Şabanzade Mehmed Efendi's (d.1708–1709) *Münazara-ı Tığ u Kalem* and 'The People of the Pen' in Late Seventeenth-Century Ottoman Empire", *Turcica*, 48 (2017), 113–155 at 122: *ḳabile-i 'Arab sāhib-i edebden vāsīṭayyu'l-aşl Hindīyy-i zenciyyu'n-neslem ki ḳıṭṭa-i ḳaṭṭ-i istivāda baña mevlid ü menşe'-i sevāḳil-i Nil ü Furat u melce' vü me'va menābil-i āb-i ḳayāt idi*.

131 I draw from unpublished work by Şeyma Benli on the *münazara* genre. From her sample, only Ahmedī's text mentions Idris. For Firdevsī's text, see A. Tanyıldız, "Uzun Firdevsī ve 'Münazara-i seyf ü kalem'", *Türk Bilim Araştırmaları*, 22 (2007), 163–188.

132 Tuşalp Atiyas, "Eloquence in Context", 124.

namely that we can perhaps detect an antiquarian outlook gradually replacing the occultist one in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. However, given that the topic has also not been the focus of significant study in the non-Ottoman Islamic world, we can understand that there remains a long way to go.

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