

C. Research reports

Knowing and controlling nature in Ottoman culture

In December 2019, the inaugural conference organized by the GHOST project attempted to grapple with the Ottoman concepts of nature and the supernatural. With a team of scholars assembled following an open call for contributions, the conference sought to map an emerging field in Ottoman studies, one that seeks to trace the varying conceptions and techniques pertaining to the hidden world in an early modern Islamicate empire, following the recent surge of such studies concerning late medieval Middle Eastern cultures. The second conference, held in January 2022 in the framework of Halcyon Days in Crete, expanded its lens to encompass visions of the world and of nature in the Ottoman Empire (including non-Muslim populations), with an emphasis on the well-established debates on the Enlightenment(s), the Weberian disenchantment (and/or re-enchantment) of the world, and the way these notions may be applied in non-European environments. The third and final conference, on “Knowing and controlling nature in Ottoman culture: scientific and occultist approaches in a global perspective”, was held in November 2023. The

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Pantić, Nikola. 2023-2024. “Probing Hidden Knowledge through Divine Inspiration: Charismatic Authority and Occult Sciences in 17th- and 18th-century Ottoman Conservative Theology”. *Aca'ib: Occasional papers on the Ottoman perceptions of the supernatural* 4.
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twenty-three papers presented sought to explore the intermingling of occult and scientific approaches (as described by Brian Vickers) and the various paths toward knowledge and action followed simultaneously or not by Ottoman scholars and commoners. Participants shed light on the peculiar characteristics of Ottoman science, and the extent to which vernacular “science of the market” interacted with scholarly traditional or intercultural scientific training and activity. The conference proceedings also explored the degree to which Ottoman occultism built upon previous traditions, whether it developed its own techniques, and interacted with other occult traditions, within or outside of the empire. Overall, the proceedings created the space for the examination of whether it is meaningful to situate Ottoman scientific activity (including occult sciences) in a global context, and how best to proceed accordingly.

Here we present a selection of seven short papers from among those delivered in the workshop. Two of the contributors, W. Sasson Chahanovich and Nikola Pantić, sent extended versions of their papers, which are published in the Papers section of this issue.¹

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- 1 In addition, the following papers were also delivered in the workshop: **Hasan Umut**, “Astrology in Aydın Sayılı’s scholarship: some remarks on the historiography of science in modern Turkey”; **Işık Demirakın**, “Between supernatural and natural in the late eighteenth—early nineteenth century Ottoman Empire”; **Aslı Niyazioğlu**, “How to make starlings bring tons of olive to Istanbul? Late fifteenth-century historians and a letrist talisman”; **Feray Coşkun**, “Control of nature in Ottoman Ajaib al-makhlūqāt”; **Amila Buturović**, “The occult pharmacopeia of Ottoman Bosnia: plants and herbs in love spells”; **Zeynep Aydoğan**, “Forging paths of continuity: “borderline” miracles in the early menākīb-nāme literature”; **Rao Mohsin Ali Noor**, “Martial apparitions: corporeality, cosmology, and crisis on the Ottoman-Habsburg borderlands (c.1593–1606)”; **Ahmet Tunç Şen**, “The Role of Experience in Astrology and an 18th-Century Ottoman Court Astrologer’s Take on Experiential Knowledge”; **Yasemin Akçagüner**, “Crises and critical days: medical astrology in the work of Şanizade Ataullah Efendi (d.1826)”; **Sara Nur Yıldız**, “A felicitous translation: Meḥmed es-Su’ūdī’s Meṭālī’u’l-sa’adet (composed ca. 1582) and its Jalayirid model of prognostic astrology and related practices”; **Kostas Sarris**, “A playful and drinking Greek-Orthodox natural magic: the ‘marvelous things’ of Kaisarios Dapontes”; **Ethan Menchinger**, “Interpreting the dreamscapes of early Ottoman chronicles”.