

# The Ottoman Hermes: Notes on the Reception of the Hermetic Tradition in Ottoman Scholarship

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Hermeticism encompasses a complex framework of philosophical and mystical ideas centered on the notion that profound insights into the interconnectedness of microcosm and the macrocosm, encapsulated in the maxim, “as above, so below,” were divinely revealed to the legendary figure of Hermes (also known as Trismegistus or *al-Muthallath*). Hermes, often conflated with figures such as Idris and Enoch, is credited with transmitting this form of occult knowledge, commonly referred to as Hermetic wisdom, to the elect. Originating in Hellenistic tradition, Hermeticism continued to flourish within the medieval Arabic milieu, before experiencing a revival in Europe during the Renaissance.<sup>1</sup> Her-

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1 The fullest account of Islamic hermeticism is to be found in K. van Bladel, *The Arabic Hermes: from Pagan Sage to Prophet of Science* (Oxford 2009); for a more concise description, see, e.g., idem, “Hermes and Hermetica,” *Encyclopaedia of Islam Three; EP*, s.v. “Hirmis (Harmas, Harmīs, Hirmīs)” (M. Plessner); *TDVİA*, “Hermes” (M. E. Kılıç); M. M. Knight, *Magic in Islam* (New York 2016), 107–136; see also M. Ullmann, *Die Natur- und Gebeimwissenschaften im Islam* (Leiden 1972), 368–378, especially on the Arabic *corpus Hermeticum*. On Hermes and Hermetism in ancient and Western contexts see I. Merkel – A. G. Debus (eds), *Hermeticism and the Renaissance: Intellectual History and the Occult in*

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meticism manifests through three primary dimensions within this tradition:<sup>2</sup> firstly, the *corpus Hermeticum*, a collection of texts including the renowned *tabula smaragdina*, which were transmitted to the medieval Islamic world through translations from Syrian sources; secondly, the philosophical tenets elucidated within these texts, which emphasize the interconnectedness of all phenomena, the hierarchical order of the cosmos encompassing planets, stars, spiritual entities, metals, plants, animals, and the assertion that the universe can be influenced through the manipulation of these hierarchies via magical means; and finally, the mythic figure of Hermes, revered as a saintly or even prophetic figure, whose teachings are regarded as sacred and exclusive to a select few initiates. This discussion primarily focuses on the third dimension of Hermeticism, namely the reverence and transmission of Hermes' teachings, which remain a central focus within the tradition.<sup>3</sup>

I propose that the establishment of a tradition tracing back to Idris/Hermes within Ottoman culture was significantly influenced by Illuminationist philosophy. However, it is important to note that not all authors who reference Idris, and potentially Hermes, necessarily subscribe to al-Suhrawardi's teachings. In Islamic tradition, the Prophet Idris is revered as a polymath bestowed with divine knowledge in various fields, conveyed either directly from God or through an angel in the form of sacred texts (*ṣuḥuf*).<sup>4</sup> This portrayal of Idris as

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*Early Modern Europe* (Washington 1988); W. J. Hanegraaff, "Hermes Trismegistus and Hermeticism", in M. Sgarbi (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Renaissance Philosophy*, 2018, Springer, Cham. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-02848-4\\_180-1](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-02848-4_180-1) with recent bibliography.

2 For the various uses of the term, see van Bladel, *The Arabic Hermes*, 17–22.

3 The history of the first aspect, i.e. texts attributed to Hermes, and the second, i.e. correspondences between the natural realms and the microcosm-macrocosm analogy, as well as what is called hermetic (or natural) magic, is a strong desideratum. See, e.g. I. Nokso-Koivisto, "Summarized Beauty: The Microcosm-Macrocosm Analogy and Islamic Aesthetics", *Studia Orientalia*, 111 (2011), 251–269; C. Bonmariage – S. Moureau (eds), *Le Cercle des lettres de l'alphabet: Dā'irat al-ʾaḥruf al-ʾabjadīyya. Un traité pratique de magie des lettres attribué à Hermès* (Leiden 2017); L. Saif, "A Preliminary Study of the Pseudo-Aristotelian Hermetica: Texts, Context, and Doctrines", *Al-ʿUṣūr al-Wuṣṭā*, 29 (2021), 20–80. For the Ottoman times, see some remarks in M. Sariyannis, "Ottoman Occultism and Its Social Contexts: Preliminary Remarks", *Acā'ib: Occasional papers on the Ottoman perceptions of the supernatural*, 3 (2022), 35–66 at 51–53.

4 *EP*, s.v. "Idris" (G. Vajda); on his identification with Hermes, see van Bladel, *The Arabic Hermes*, 155 and 164–167; on Idris/Hermes' identification with Enoch see the sources collected in J. C. Reeves – A. Yoshiko Reed, *Enoch from Antiquity to the Middle Ages*, vol.

a repository of knowledge is well-entrenched in Islamic lore. In fifteenth-century almanacs and world chronicles (*takvim*), Idris is depicted as the recipient of astrological knowledge. One such detailed account, dating shortly after the fall of Constantinople, cites Beyzāvī asserting that Idris or Aḥnūḥ (Enoch) acquired astrology directly from the heavens, emphasizing that no physical sheets of paper originated from the stars themselves (*nücumdan öndin ašla kitāb ve şubūfinmedi*). These sources attribute knowledge of the cosmos' origins to Idris through divine revelation.<sup>5</sup> In an early-fifteenth-century adaptation of a Persian cosmography, it is recounted that Idris beseeched God to alleviate the burden of the angel carrying the sun. In response, the angel facilitated Idris' journey to explore the sun; his soul remained there, while knowledge was transmitted to his 200,000 disciples.<sup>6</sup> Another version, cited by the anonymous author of *Dürr-i meknûn*, portrays Idris as the inventor of astrology, astronomy (*raşad*), and weaving. In his rendition, Idris forms a friendship with Azrail, ultimately requesting his own death. Upon divine intervention Idris is resurrected and ascends to paradise, opting to reside there indefinitely. Moreover, he is credited with the building of the indestructible pyramids, enhancing them with talismans to protect them from the Flood.<sup>7</sup> Idris stands as one among a succession of prophets bestowed with divine knowledge. According to Şükrullah Efendi, the prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) acquired the secrets of God's names from a mysterious figure, later revealed to be Davud (David), brother of Hızır.<sup>8</sup> Similarly, in 1487, Uzun Firdevsî recounted that, besides the Qur'an, God conveyed 104

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I: *Sources from Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (Oxford 2018), 270–295; A. Hessayon – A. Yoshiko Reed – G. Boccaccini (eds), *Rediscovering Enoch? The Antediluvian Past from the Fifteenth to Nineteenth Centuries* (Leiden 2023) and, especially for the Ottoman case, K. Atanasova, “Enoch as Idris in Early Modern Ottoman Sufi Writings: Two Case Studies”, in *ibid.*, 397–412.

5 Atsız (ed.), *Osmanlı tarihine ait takvimler* (Istanbul 2019), 68/69, 140–144/141–145, 152/153.

6 B. Sarıkaya (ed.), *Tercüme-i Acâ'ibül-mablûkât (İnceleme – Metin – Dizin)*, ed. G. Kut, (Istanbul 2019), 138–139.

7 L. Kaptein (ed.), *Dürr-i meknun. Kritische Edition mit Kommentar* (Asch 2007), 127=404–405; A. Demirtaş (ed.), *Dürr-i meknun (Tıpkıbasım – İnceleme – Çevriyazı – Dizin)* (Istanbul 2009), 123–124; N. Sakaoğlu (ed.), *Dürr-i meknun: saklı inciler* (Istanbul 1999), 48. On the pyramids (*Heram*) see *Dürr-i meknûn*, ed. Kaptein, 188=458; ed. Demirtaş, 155–156; ed. Sakaoğlu, 74.

8 Şükrullah Efendi, *Behcetü't-tevârih: tarihin aydınlığında*, ed. H. Almaz (Istanbul 2010), 240.

books to humanity through the tongue of Cebrâ'il: ten to Adam, fifty to Seth, thirty to Idris, and ten to Ibrahim, alongside the holy scriptures granted to Moses, David, Jesus, and Muhammad.<sup>9</sup> Idris retains his status as a patron of science and wisdom in subsequent works. For instance, Lâtîfî's mid-sixteenth century ode to Istanbul lauds Idris in this capacity, whereas, an early eighteenth-century mufti of Athens credits him with the diffusion (*neşr*) of the occult sciences (*'ulûm-ı ğaribeyi ve nücûm ve talâsım ve havâş ilimleri*) throughout the Maghreb.<sup>10</sup> Sufi authors, such as the Bayrami/Melami Abdullah Bosnevi (d. 1644) and the Celveti Isma'il Hakki Bursevi (d. 1725), influenced by the writings of Ibn Arabi, recount Idris' ascent to the sun. The latter identifies him with Enoch and tentatively attributes the construction of the pyramids to him as a means of preserving knowledge from the flood, establishing further connection with the lineage of Sufi spiritual leaders.<sup>11</sup>

Scholarly analyses frequently equate Idris with Hermes from an early period. For instance, Manyasoğlu's early fifteenth-century encyclopedia recounts stories about the prophet Suleyman "related by Hermes".<sup>12</sup> Offering a more comprehensive examination, Şükrullah Efendi, a contemporary of Manyasoğlu, provides detailed insights. He identifies Idris, who initiated the second millennium cycle in the history of humanity, under the alternate names of Hânûh, Urmus (according to Greek tradition), Hermēs (as recognized by Arabs).<sup>13</sup> Additionally, Şükrullah categorizes Hermes among the "wise men of old and first philosophers" in his own compilation:

9 Firdevsî, *Firdevsî-i Tâvîl and his Da'vet-nâme: Interpretation, Transcription, Index, Facsimile and Microfiche*, ed. F. Büyükkarcı (Harvard 1995), 144.

10 Lâtîfî, *Evsâf-ı İstanbul*, ed. N. Suner Pekin (Istanbul 1977), 34; Lâtîfî, *Eloge d'Istanbul, suivi du Traité de l'invective (Anonyme)*, ed. S. Yerasimos (Paris 2001), 84; Mahmud Efendi, *Bir Osmanlı müftüsünün gözünden Atina tarihi*, ed. G. Tunalı (Istanbul 2020), 360.

11 Atanasova, "Enoch as Idris", 404–411.

12 Z. Buçukcu, "Mahmud bin Kadı-ı Manyas'ın '*Acebül-üccab* adlı eserinin transkripsiyon ve dizini", unpublished MA thesis, Hacettepe University, 2017, 77; cf. C. Sucu, "The Marvelous Sciences in '*Acebül-üccab*: Disseminating and Reframing of Occult Knowledge for the Ottoman Audience in the Early Fifteenth Century", unpublished MA thesis, Central European University, 2020, 9, 54.

13 Şükrullah Efendi, *Behcetü't-tevârih*, ed. Almaz, 119. Şükrullah notes that Aristo (Aristotle) wrote *Uşnutas*, related to the science of magic (*sıbr*), as well as a commentary on the prophet Idris's book on the science of letters (ibid., 269). Remarkably, *Uşnutas* or *Ustutas* was usually attributed to Hermes (Ullmann, *Die Natur- und Geheimwissenschaften*, 375).

[the wise men of old and the first philosophers] The first of them all is Hermes. He had all three degrees: prophecy, wisdom, and kingship. He visited the orbit of Saturn, orbited with Saturn for thirty years and learned the situation of the spheres. He returned to earth and taught [what he had learnt] to the people of the earth. It is said that it is he who organized the science of astronomy and who wrote the book *Kenzü'l-esrâr* on the science of letters. According to a story, Cebrail appeared to him in human form, greeted him and asked him: "Hey prophet of God, where is Cebrail?" He answered: "In the southern part of the earth, in this town and in this house, perhaps it is even you". Cebrail confirmed: "Yes, it is me". Hermes was holding his writings in his hands. Cebrail asked him to throw them all into the sea. He took some of them, Cebrail took the rest; those which he could hold in his hand, he threw them into the sea. But those grasped by Cebrail fell on the earth; from them, kings, wise men, teachers and philosophers benefitted.<sup>14</sup>

In the version of universal history presented by 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Biṣṭāmī's (d. 1454), Idris assumes a prominent role as the harbinger of the second millenium of humanity, under the dominion of Jupiter. A descendant of Seth, explicitly equated with the Hellenistic Agathodaemon, Idris is depicted as a master of letter magic or lettrism, and is credited with the invention of writing implements and astrology, as well as with the establishment of temples and the tripartite division of human society into priests, kings and flock. Additionally, Idris is associated with Enoch and Hermes.<sup>15</sup> Celalzâde Salih Çelebi (d. 1567), in a historical work on Egypt submitted to Sultan Suleyman in 1547, references "the first Hermes," who "according to some" is Idris. According to this account, Idris observed celestial movements to develop astrology, medicine, and various sciences. Anticipating the coming deluge, he purportedly constructed the pyramids to safeguard knowledge.<sup>16</sup> Mustafa 'Âli (d. 1599) provides detailed insights into the life of Idris, also known as Enoch or Uḥnūḥ, and his contributions. While citing

14 Şükrullah Efendi, *Behcetü't-tevâriḥ*, ed. Almaz, 267. On *Kenzü'l-esrâr* see Ullmann, *Die Natur- und Geheimwissenschaften*, 375–376.

15 N. Gardiner, "Lettrism and History in 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Biṣṭāmī's *Nazm al-sulūk fī musāmarat al-mulūk*", in L. Saif, F. Leoni et al. (eds), *Islamicate Occult Sciences in Theory and Practice* (Leiden 2020), 230–266 and esp. 240. Seth is also identified "by the historians" with Zoroaster (ibid., 246).

16 A. Manav, "Salih bin Celaleddin'in *Tarih-i Mısır*'ı (Dil incelemesi-metin-dizin)", unpublished PhD dissertation, Pamukkale University, 2018, 90 (fols 11b–12a); on the identification of Hermes with Idris see also ibid., 169 (fol. 69a), 245 (fol. 120a), 247 (fol.

the epistles of the Brethren of Purity as a source regarding Idris' ascension to Saturn and the pyramid construction to preserve knowledge, 'Ālī does not delve into either tradition. He describes Idris as Ūriyā-i Ṣāliṣ, the "Third Ūriyā",<sup>17</sup> as he was "triple (*müselles*) in prophecy, knowledge and wisdom." Greeks, identifying him with "the Hermes of Hermes", likened him to the planet Mercury.<sup>18</sup> Taşköprüzade similarly identifies Idris with Enoch and Hermes:

Know that the source of the philosophical and speculative sciences (*al-ʿulūm al-ḥikmiyya wa-l-naẓariyya*), the master of all there is in them, is the Prophet Idrīs, peace be upon him. God gave him prophecy and wisdom (*nubuwwa wa-ḥikma*) and knowledge of the stars (*wa-ʿilm al-nujūm*, i.e. astronomy). God sent a book of thirty leaves down upon him, and He made him understand the number of years (*ʿadad al-sinīn*) and arithmetic (*al-ḥisāb*); and God taught him [all] the languages, even though the people of his time spoke 72 languages. He was born in Egypt and they called him "Hermes of the Hermes" (*harmis al-harāmisa*), and in Greek "Er-mīs", that is to say Mercury (*ʿutārid*). It was arabicized into *Harmis*. But his original name was Enoch (*hanūkh*), which was arabicized into *akhnūkh*. God Almighty called him Idrīs in His clear Arabic book (i.e. the Qurʾān) because of how much he had studied God's book. It is said that his teacher was Ghawthādhīmūn or Aghthādhīmūn, the Egyptian. The meaning of this is "the auspicious one, the good fortune" (*al-saʿid al-jadd*). It is said that he is Seth (*Shūth*), peace be upon him...

[Idrīs's] time on earth lasted for 82 years. Then God lifted him up to a high place. He is the first one who sewed clothes and judged by the stars, [the first one] to give warning against floods, the first one to build temples and praise God in them, the first one who looked into medicine, and the first one who composed poems and verses of poetry. He is the one who built the pyramids of Egypt and illustrated in them (through paintings) all the sciences and arts and their tools, fearing that their records might be taken by the flood.<sup>19</sup>

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121a), 339 (fol. 180a). In another point, this story is attributed to Idris, who ascended to heavens (a detail not mentioned regarding Hermes): 102 (fol. 19a).

17 This must be a corruption of the obscure designation of Hermes as "the third Ūrānī" by al-Mubashshir ibn Fātik (mid-eleventh c.), the other two being Seth and Agathodaemon: van Bladel, *The Arabic Hermes*, 184–188.

18 Gelibolulu Mustafa Âli, *Künhü'l-abbār. 1. Rükün (tenkitli metin)*, eds S. Donuk – D. Örs (Istanbul 2020), 1:519–529. Elsewhere Ali speaks of two cities called in the Egyptian (*Ḳibt*) language Hermes "i.e. the planet Mercury" (ibid., 611–612).

19 Tashkupri-zadah, *Miftāh as-Saʿādah wa misbāh as-siyādah fī mawduʿāt al-ʿulūm*, by Ahmad b. Mustafa (Tashkupri-zadah), ed. K. Bakry and A. Abu'l-Nur (Cairo 1968), 314–315; cf.

Kâtip Çelebi's account further enriches the narrative surrounding Idris. According to him, Idris, under the titles Hermes al-Hirāmise and *al-muthallath bi l-ni'ma* (the thrice blessed, a version of Greek Trismegistos), prophesied the impending Flood and entrusted the entirety of knowledge's secrets to the Pyramids he constructed:

İdrīs... wrote with the pen and came to be known for the sciences in a way that no one else came to be known. He was called "Hermes of the Hermes" (*hirmis al-harāmisa*) and "the one thrice blessed" (*al-muthallath bi-l-ni'ma*), because he was a prophet, a king and a philosopher (*hakim*). All of the sciences which appeared before the Flood came from him, according to many scholars. He was the first Hermes (*hirmis al-awwal*), i.e. İdrīs b. Yarid b. Mahlāyil b. Anūsh b. Shīth b. Ādam, peace be upon him, the resident in the uppermost part of Upper Egypt.<sup>20</sup>

As with Taşköprüzade, Kâtip Çelebi assigns to Idris/Hermes the first knowledge of celestial phenomena, the construction of temples, and the development of medicinal practices. Furthermore, he credits Idris/Hermes with foreseeing the catastrophic Flood and erecting the pyramids out of concern for the potential loss of this accumulated knowledge:

He built the pyramids in the uppermost part of Upper Egypt and made images of all the arts and tools in them and sketched the descriptions of the sciences and perfections, in the desire to preserve them for eternity. Then the Flood came and the people perished, and no science remained, nor any trace except for those on the arch... Then it gradually began to recommence (*isti'nāf*) and return (*i'āda*). So what had been wiped out of science returned to its former place of virtue and elevation... It continues as a support of the Muslim community until the Day of Resurrection and Judgement.<sup>21</sup>

The narrative of concealing knowledge within the pyramids as a safeguard against the Flood is also echoed in Evliya Çelebi's account. However, in this rendition, it is Idris (not Hermes), portrayed as a disciple of Cebrā'il and "a

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Taşköprülüzâde Ahmed Efendi, *Mevzuat'ül-ulûm (İlimler ansiklopedisi)*, tr. M. Çevik (Istanbul 2011), 1: 285–286.

20 This last sentence comes from al-Qazwini, who however has Akhnukh (Enoch) in the place of Idris: Reeves – Reed, *Enoch from Antiquity to the Middle Ages*, 1:76.

21 Kâtip Çelebi, *Kesf-el-zunun*, eds Ş. Yaltkaya – K. R. Bilge (Istanbul 1941 [2nd ed. Ankara 2014]), 1:25–26; cf. *Kesfûz-zunûn*, tr. R. Balci (Istanbul 2007), 1:31.

prophet to the Sabian people,” who collaborates with King Surid in the construction of the pyramids and the preservation of his books and treasures.<sup>22</sup> In a somewhat divergent tradition, presented in Ömer Karakaşzâde's (d. 1637) historical narrative on wisdom, Hermes is not directly equated with Idris but rather depicted as his disciple:

And they say that the Hermes of Hermeses, who is the compiler of the rules of the stars and talismans and medicine, learned from Idris – upon whom be peace! Idris ascended to the sphere of Saturn and rotated with Saturn's sphere for thirty years, and having understood the conditions of the spheres he descended and proclaimed the knowledge of the stars and the other issues of the spheres.

Regarding Hermes, Karakaşzâde cites Bişâmî, indicating that “he began the revealing of the nature and quality of knowledge” under the guidance of a figure revealed to be his own “perfect nature” (*îbâ'-i tâmm*). Accordingly, Karakaşzâde recounts another story detailing Hermes' enlightenment by the angel Cebra'il.<sup>23</sup> It is worth noting that the initial story, along with references to Ag-

22 [Evlîya Çelebi], *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*, eds R. Dankoff – N. Tezcan – M. D. Sheridan (London 2018), 91 (cf. *ibid.*, 53 for the sources of the Nile: bridge of Hermes the Philosopher/of Qibtim (first king of the Copts)/of Akhmumus/of Misrayim the Great/of Ptolemy the Philosopher/of Alexander/of Aristotle the Philosopher/of Ptolemy the King/of Marmir the Philosopher/of Simon the King/of Daniel); Evliya Çelebi, *Evliya 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*, eds S. A. Kahraman – Y. Dağlı – R. Dankoff (Istanbul 2007), 11. The legend of the pyramids does not always carry connections with Hermes/Idris. According to a late fourteenth-century cosmography, “they depicted all kinds of plants and elixirs... the heavenly sciences... wonderful talismans, the books and knowledge of every magician (*kâhin*) and every sort of magic (*sîbr*); the likes and the acts of every doctor and magician (*her hekîm ve kâhin*) who lived in the world”: Ş. B. Al, “Acâ'ibü'l-mahlûkât (35.–70. varak) (Giriş, metin, inceleme, dizin – Sözlük)”, unpublished MA thesis, Sakarya University, 2010, 53 (f. 68a). On medieval attitudes against the pyramids and the idea that they were preserving ancient knowledge see 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 552–556.

23 M. Kurz, *Ways to Heaven, Gates to Hell: Fazlîzâde 'Alî's Struggle With The Diversity of Ottoman Islam* (Berlin 2011), 217–228; at any rate, he notes that “some people say that Idris is the Hermes of Hermeses” (*ibid.*, 223). On Idris/Hermes' ascension to Saturn, see van



athodaemon and other elements, appears to be influenced by al-Suhrawardī's writings.<sup>24</sup> A similar account of Hermes as a heir and pupil of Idris (*vaşisi ve halifesi*), entitled to teach astrology to “people of his own religion” (*kendü ehl-i milletinden ve neslinden*), is found in a translation of an anonymous Arabic epic, completed in 1477 for Mehmed II.<sup>25</sup>

In brief, the lineage of esoteric wisdom revealed to Idris/Hermes, whether regarded as a singular figure or interchangeably referenced, permeates various textual sources during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Notably, Evliya Çelebi references Hermes, identified as Uhnūh (Enoch) in Hebrew and Idris in the language of angels (*Uhnūh ki Hürmüs'dür, lisân-ı İbrî'de Uhnūh'dur; ehl-i cennet lisânı üzre melâ'ikeler Uhnūh Hürmüs'e İdris dediler*).<sup>26</sup> This tradition often intertwines with sacred lineages; for instance, Uzun Firdevsî's 1487 grimoire, *Da'vet-nâme*, includes both Idris and Hermes (Hürmüz Hâkîm) within a lineage spanning Indian, Hebrew and Persian luminaries: from Idris to Tamtam-ı Hindî, Yoḥannās Hâkîm, Hermes (Hürmüz Hâkîm), Yūḥannā Hâkîm, and onward to Büzürcmihr, Avicenna, Ca'fer-i Sâdıḳ and Nasîr-i Tusî.<sup>27</sup> Within such traditions the figure of the Prophet Daniel, prominent in divi-natory lore is often intertwined; a late sixteenth-century translation of a Persian *melheme*, or book of prognostication, traces the genealogy of the book to Daniel, followed by Hermes, Büzürcmihr (Anushirvan's vizier), Valis (Iskender's companion) and ultimately Ca'fer-i Sâdıḳ.<sup>28</sup> Daniel is purported to have acquired such mystical arts, notably geomancy, from the angel Cebra'il, likely

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Bladel, *The Arabic Hermes*, 164–184; on Biştāmî's references to Hermes's “perfect inner nature” see Gardiner, “Lettrism and History”, 246.

24 van Bladel, *The Arabic Hermes*, 225. On the concept of “perfect nature”, also connected with Apollonius from Tyana or Bālīnās, see Saif, “Pseudo-Aristotelian Hermetica”, 25–26, 38, 61–63.

25 M. I. Güler (ed.), *Anonim: Kissa-i Anter – Anter destanı* (Istanbul 2023), v. 1, 273 (f. 5b). Nemrud finds out and forces the believers to reveal the secrets of astrology to him, in order to safeguard their liberty of religion.

26 Evliya Çelebi, *Evliyâ Çelebi seyahatnâmesi, X. Kitap*, eds Kahraman – Dağlı – Dankoff, 11. He gives the genealogy Adam > Seth > Enuş > Kīnān > Mehlā'il > Hūd > Enoch/Hermes/Idris, although in the same chapter, Idris is also mentioned as son of Enoch.

27 Firdevsî, *Firdevsî-i Tavil and his Da'vet-nâme*, ed. Büyükkarcı, 113–114.

28 Ş. Boyraz, “Türk halkbiliminin yazılı kaynakları olarak melhemeler”, unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Hacettepe University, 2000, 341. The Ottoman text has Hürmüz and Üveys where the Persian text quotes Hermes and Vâlis (ibid., 366).

influenced by the Hermetic tradition.<sup>29</sup> Regarding talismanic practices, Apollonius of Tyana (Belinās Ḥakīm) stands out as a frequently invoked name.<sup>30</sup>

A notable observation regarding the pre-Ottoman Hermetic tradition is the absence of any mention of the “three Hermes” in Ottoman sources. While Arabic narratives synthesize diverse ancient traditions and provide historic context, inspired perhaps by the Greek epithet of *Trismegistos*, Ottoman sources primarily focus on the first Hermes. According to Arabic accounts, the first Hermes was a sage, who founded the sciences and safeguarded them in the pyramids before the Flood; the second Hermes, reputedly the teacher of Pythagoras in Babylon, revitalized these sciences post-Flood; and the third Hermes, an Egyptian physician and alchemist, instructed Asclepius.<sup>31</sup> Despite references by authors such as al-Shahrazuri and al-Suyuti (widely read by the Ottomans) to these narratives, Ottoman scholars largely ignore the second and third Hermes, adhering instead to the first, whom they equate with Enoch/Idris. They assert his ascent to the celestial sphere, prophetic prediction of the Flood, and concealment of all sciences within the pyramids — all elements associated with the antediluvian Hermes. While scant evidence suggests residual awareness of the “three Hermes” tradition — such as Celalzâde Salih Çelebi’s mention in a marginal note within his mid-sixteenth century history of Egypt — Ottoman authors generally overlook the latter two Hermes.<sup>32</sup> Exceptions include Kâtib Çelebi’s reference to “the first Hermes” and Evliya Çelebi’s description of him as a “a prophet to the Sabian people,” a community linked with the “second Hermes” in tradition. Additionally, İsmâ’il Hakkı Bursevî’s

29 E.g. in Evliya Çelebi, *Evliyâ Çelebi seyahatnâmesi, I. Kitap: Topkapı Sarayı Kütüphanesi Bağdat 304 numaralı yazmanın transkripsiyonu – dizini*, eds R. Dankoff – S. A. Kahraman – Y. Dağlı (Istanbul 2006), 259 (f. 156b).

30 See e.g. L. Raggetti, “Apollonius of Tyana’s *Great Book of Talismans*”, *Nuncius*, 34 (2019), 155–182; Firdevsî, *Firdevsî-i Tavîl and his Da’vet-nâme*, ed. Büyükkarcı, 149; B. Hallum, “New Light on Early Arabic *Awfâq* Literature”, in L. Saif – F. Leoni – M. Melvin-Koushki – F. Yahya (eds), *Islamicate Occult Sciences in Theory and Practice* (Leiden 2020), 57–161 at 110 and Kurz, *Ways to Heaven*, 237–241 (on the genealogy of the 100 x 100 magic square by Lutfi al-Ṭokâti, or Molla Lutfi, back to Greek philosophers); M. Melvin-Koushki, “Taşköprizâde on the (Occult) Science of Plague Prevention and Cure”, *Nazarîyat*, 6/2 (2020), 133–168 at 160–161.

31 See van Bladel, *The Arabic Hermes*, 121–163, for a thorough survey of the origins of this tradition.

32 Manav, “Salih bin Celaleddin’in *Tarih-i Mısır*’ı”, 245 (fol. 120a). In a strange twist, the same work relates that “the second Hermes” is Idris (!): *ibid.*, 248 (fol. 121b).

(d. 1725) acknowledges Hermes as a master of alchemy, possibly hinting at the “third Hermes.”<sup>33</sup> Notably, there is a lack of significant Hermetic literature in Ottoman Turkish, with no attributed sayings, maxims, or treatises attributed to Hermes. Although Mustafa Ali and Bursevî mention maxims believed to belong to Hermetic literature, they attribute them to Idris rather than Hermes,<sup>34</sup> suggesting that while some Hermetic literature circulated, it did not exist as a unified *corpus Hermeticum* in Ottoman Turkish.

It could be argued that the Ottoman Hermetic tradition primarily drew from the Illuminationist rendition of the legend, which placed significant emphasis on the celestial and undisputed origins of the perennial wisdom attributed to Hermes. Scholars have observed that al-Suhrawardi overtly positioned Hermes as his predecessor, the initial figure in a lineage of sages culminating in his own revelations. Kevin van Bladel suggests that his tactic may have been employed to critique the philosophical traditions, particularly the “Peripatetics,” following Ibn Sina, by asserting a “more ancient, authoritative, and divine source than Aristotle.”<sup>35</sup> This inclination was so pronounced that in Ottoman times the influential Illuminationist al-Shahrazuri’s account of the Three Hereses appeared to diminish in prominence, supplanted by the potent imagery of Hermes as the recipient of perennial wisdom.<sup>36</sup> One may postulate the perhaps far-fetched suggestion that those Ottoman authors speaking of Hermes have links with the Illuminationist tradition. Figures such as Şükruallah Efendi, Taşköprüzade and Kâtib Çelebi, as well as Karakaşzâde align with this perspective. Conversely, authors associated with alternative intellectual traditions, no-

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33 “God sent this science to Adam, to Hermes of Hermes and it reached the Prophet, passing from hand to hand through time”: İsmâil Hakkı Bursevî, *Tamâmül-feyz fî bâbî’r-ricâl: Atpazarî Kutup Osman Efendi menâkıbı (İnceleme – Çeviri – Tıpkıbasım)*, eds R. Muslu – A. Namlı (İstanbul 2020), 285. On Hermes and alchemy see also P. Carusi, “Harmis al-Harâmisa dans l’alchimie islamique. Une recherche par auteur et par sujet”, *Early Science and Medicine*, 5/2 (2000), 121–130.

34 İsmâil Hakkı Bursevî, *Tamâmül-feyz*, eds Muslu – Namlı, 178 (“Idris had said that whoever lives in a place devoid of a victorious sultan, a just judge, a wise doctor, a lively market and a running river has lost himself, his family, his wealth and his children”); Âli, eds. Donuk and Örs, *Künhül-abbâr. 1. Rükün*, 1:528. For the motto, as transferred by al-Shahrazuri, see van Bladel, *The Arabic Hermes*, 208.

35 van Bladel, *The Arabic Hermes*, 223.

36 On al-Shahrazuri’s account see van Bladel, *The Arabic Hermes*, 128.

tably Akbarian Sufism, often recount stories of Idris' ascent and inspiration, identifying him with Enoch, rather than Hermes.<sup>37</sup>

Illuminationist authors exhibited a preference for Hermes for a particular reason: his association with perennial knowledge bestowed by revelation aligned with the hermetic theory on knowledge, characterized by esotericism or the notion that knowledge should be reserved for a select few and withheld from the masses. From Taşköprüzâde to Ömer Karakaşzâde and Kâtib Çelebi, these authors underscored Aristotle's alleged method of imparting knowledge in a manner unintelligible to the common populace. Concurrently, the concept of a pre-Diluvian, perennial knowledge expanded the scope of authority beyond theology and legal interpretation. Alongside Hermes, ancient Greek sages such as Pythagoras or Plato, as well as Indian thinkers such as Ṭamṭam-ı Hindî (who, as previously mentioned, linked Idris with the Hebrew Yoḥannās Ḥakīm and Hermes in Uzun Firdevsî's *Da'vet-nâme*), were believed to possess wisdom (*ḥikma*) predating Muhammad, encompassing the most profound secrets of nature, the order of the universe, and methods by which to manipulate them. Illuminationist philosophy, with its dual lineage of knowledge (Eastern and the Western), served as an ideal conduit for advocating the Islamicisation of pre-Islamic or non-Islamic wisdom without resorting to "imitating the infidel".<sup>38</sup> Marlene Kurz remarks that Kâtib Çelebi's conception of *ḥikma* is closely connected to his openness to infidel wisdom,<sup>39</sup> while Aslıhan Gürbüznel recently highlighted that Mevlevî sheikhs of the seventeenth century, while favoring Illuminationism, also promoted a pluralistic outlook on religion and envisioned a society characterized by diversity and communal privacy.<sup>40</sup>

These perspectives must be contextualized within their intellectual and political milieu: the burgeoning of what can be termed Ottoman Illuminationist Hermeticism coincides with the ascent and flourishing of the Kadızadeli movement. As I and Baki Tezcan have argued elsewhere, the Kadızadellis championed

37 See Atanasova, "Enoch as Idrīs", 404–411. Mustafa Ali or İsmâ'îl Ḥaqqı Bursevî, both indifferent or dismissive of Illuminationism, attribute as we saw their Hermetic mottos to Idris (and not to Hermes).

38 See the remarks by C. W. Ernst, "The Limits of Universalism in Islamic Thought: the Case of Indian Religions", *The Muslim World*, 101 (2011), 1–19 at 7–8.

39 Kurz, *Ways to Heaven*, 204–205.

40 A. Gürbüznel, *Taming the Messiah: The Formation of an Ottoman Political Public Sphere, 1600–1700* (Oakland 2023).

an egalitarian portrayal of Islam, wherein every Muslim was deemed entitled to knowledge and reasoning. This vision inherently leaned toward uniformity and exhibited a strain of absolutism.<sup>41</sup> Illuminationist Hermeticism diverged from both of these perceptions: by advocating for gnosiological elitism over egalitarianism, it asserted the rights of ulema, scholars and sheikhs to lay claim to privileged access to truth. Simultaneously, by championing a plurality of avenues to knowledge as opposed to the uniformity of revealed prophecy, it favored the adoption of innovative concepts and imported knowledge. Consequently, one could argue that Hermetic ideas were instrumentalized to advance innovative policies and measures, including the adoption of "infidel" methods, often in a top-to-bottom direction, as shown by these authors' evident skepticism toward the egalitarian underpinnings of the fundamentalist project. However, this narrative, of course, is a distinct and multifaceted tale unto itself.<sup>42</sup>

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41 B. Tezcan, "The Portrait of the Preacher as a Young Man: Two Autobiographical Letters by Kadızade Mehmed from the Early Seventeenth Century", in M. Sariyannis (ed.), *Political Thought and Practice in the Ottoman Empire. Halcyon Days in Crete IX: A Symposium Held in Rethymno, 9–11 January 2015* (Rethymno 2019), 187–250 at 238–241; M. Sariyannis, "The Limits of Going Global: The Case of 'Ottoman Enlightenment(s)'", *History Compass* 2020; e12623, <https://doi.org/10.1111/hic3.12623>.

42 Cf. M. Sariyannis, "Sources and Traditions of Knowledge: Revelation, Hermeticism, Reasoning in an Ottoman Context", in idem (ed.), *Enchantments and Disenchantments: Early Modern Ottoman Visions of the World. Halcyon Days in Crete XI: A Symposium Held in Rethymno, 14–17 January 2022* (Rethymno, forthcoming).

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