

## C. RESEARCH REPORTS

# Working paper: *'Ajā'ib wa gharā'ib* in the early Ottoman cosmographies

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“Pes bu dünyā ‘aceb dünyādur. ‘Acā’ibi çokdur.”

*Dürr-i Mekkün*

The earliest examples of Ottoman cosmographical/geographical literature were significantly influenced by medieval Islamic cosmographies. Members of Ottoman literati made either partial, full or free translations of those works into Turkish or composed synthetical works in similar spirit.\*

Among the most famous examples of Islamic cosmography which Ottoman authors made use of, one can refer to three cosmographies. The first two bear the same title *'Ajā'ib al-Makhlūqāt wa Gharā'ib al-Mawjūdāt* (Wonders of Creation and Oddities of Existence) written by Zakariyyā' b. Muḥammad b. Maḥmūd al-Qazwīnī (d.1283) and Muḥammed b. Maḥmūd b. Aḥmad at-Ṭūsī. The third

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is the *Kharīdat al-'Ajā'ib wa Farīdat al-Gharā'ib* (The Pearl of Wonders and the Uniqueness of Things Strange) attributed to Ibn al-Wardī (d.1457).<sup>1</sup>

At-Ṭūsī presented his cosmography to the Seljukid Sultan Ṭugrul b. Arslan (r.1176-1194) in Persian sometime between 1176 and 1194.<sup>2</sup> Although written later, *'Ajā'ib al-Makhlūqāt* of al-Qazwīnī is more famous. As pointed out by Persis Berlekamp, depending on the concerns and interests of each milieu, there are different Arabic versions of this cosmography.<sup>3</sup> Later versions even included additional chapters taken from Persian translations.<sup>4</sup> Its translation is also available in European languages.<sup>5</sup>

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- 1 Rudolf Sellheim refers to the author as Pseudo-al-Wardī since none of the contemporary biographers confirm al-Wardī as the author of the *Kharīdat al-'Ajā'ib*. On the other hand, Francesca Bellino argues that it is very likely that he was the author, because al-Wardī's name appears in the oldest extant copies dated 1479 and 1487. See, R. Sellheim, *Arabische Handschriften: Materialien Zur Arabischen Literaturgeschichte* (Wiesbaden 1976), 176–186; F. Bellino, “Siraj al-Dīn ibn al-Wardī and the Ḥarīdat al-'ajā'ib: Authority and Plagiarism in a Fifteenth-century Arabic Cosmography”, *Eurasian Studies*, 12 (2014), 257–296.
  - 2 In his edition of the work, Manuchehr Sotude claims that the work must be completed sometime between A.H. 556/1176–573/1194. Muḥammad b. Maḥmūd b. Aḥmad-e Ṭūsī, *'Ajā'ib al-Makhlūqāt*, ed. M. Sotude (Tahran 1966), 15.
  - 3 The earliest extant copy dated 1280 is stored in Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Munich (BSB Cod. Arab cod. 464). It is also known as the Wasit (Iraq) copy since it was copied there. The manuscript is available online at <https://daten.digital-sammlungen.de/~db/0004/bsb00045957/images/index.html?seite=00001&l=en>.
  - 4 The most known edition is made by Ferdinand Wüstenfeld. It included parts from different editions of the same work (written in different time-frames) and even some sections from other works. In Berlekamp's words, it is a “conflation of various different manuscript versions”. P. Berlekamp, *Wonder, Image & Cosmos in Medieval Islam* (New Haven – London 2011), 6–8. For the edition see F. Wüstenfeld (ed.), *Zakariya ben Muhammed ben Mahmud el-Cazwini's Kosmographie, Kitāb 'Ajā'ib al-Makhlūqāt, Die Wunder der Schöpfung* (Göttingen 1849). Repr. F. Sezgin (ed.), (Frankfurt 1994).
  - 5 For German translations see *Zakariya ben Muhammed ben Mahmūd el-Kazwīnī's Kosmographie: Die Wunder der Schöpfung*, trans. H. Ethé (Leipzig 1868); Zakariyyā' b. Muḥammad b. Maḥmūd al-Qazwīnī, *Die Wunder des Himmels und der Erde*, trans. A. Giese (München 1988). For Italian see F. Bellino, *Le Meraviglie del creato e le Stranezze degli esseri* (Milano 2008). For partial English translation see S. Carboni, *The Wonders of Creation: A Study of the Ilkhanid London Qazwini* (Edinburg 2015).

**TABLE 1.** Content of the three cosmographies in general lines.

'Ajā'ib al-Makblūqāt of at-Ṭūsī	'Ajā'ib al-Makblūqāt of al-Qazwīnī	Kharīdat al-'Ajā'ib by Ibn al-Wardī
Heavenly bodies (planets, stars) Angels, spiritual beings Four elements Meteorological phenomena Seas, rivers, fountains, wells Climes, mountains, cities Masjids, churches Earthquakes, trees Talismans Wonders of prophets' shrines Human characteristics Nations Miracles Alchemy, science of nature Peculiarities of food Rare medicine Destiny Wondrous dreams Wonders of death Apocalyptic matters Wonders of jinn, satans, demons Wild animals, snakes	Four prefaces (on the meanings of wonder, creation, strange, existence) Heavenly bodies, angels Time, months Earth, creation, four elements Meteorological phenomena Oceans, seas Earth, the shape of earth, seven climes Earthquakes, eclipse Mountains, rivers, fountains, wells Minerals and precious metals, stones Plants, animals Human characteristics Nations (Arabs, Persian, Romans, Turks, Indians etc.) Occupations Poetry, music, medicine Astronomy, numbers Talismans, magic Science of alchemy, engineering Djinns, demons Wild animals, birds, insects, animals with wondrous forms	Mountain Qāf and its beyond The Encircling Ocean Climes, regions, countries Seas, islands Rivers, springs, wells Mountains Stones Minerals Plants, fruits, seeds Birds Pre-Adamic history of the earth Apocalyptic and eschatological matters

While the first two describe heavenly phenomena, the layers of the heavens, the planets, stars, angels, demons, as well as Paradise and Hell in great detail, the *Kharīdat al-'Ajā'ib* is more concerned with terrestrial space.<sup>6</sup>

6 For translations in Latin see C. J. Tornberg (ed.), *Fragmentum libri Margarita mirabilium auctore Ibn el-Verdi*, (Uppsala 1835); A. Haylender (ed.), *Operis cosmographici Ibn Vardi caput primum de regionibus* (Lundae 1823). For a partial translation in French see J. de Guignes, "Perles de Merveilles", in F. Sezgin (ed.), *Studies on al-Wat Wat (d. 1318), Ad-Dimasqi (d. 1327) Ibn al-Wardi (d. c. 1446) and al-Bakuwi (15 th. Century)* (Frankfurt 1994), 147–187.

Describing both invisible and visible phenomena in the heavenly and terrestrial realms, they dwell on wondrous and strange phenomena (*'ajā'ib wa gharā'ib*) to highlight God's omnipotence and wisdom behind His creation. Their emphasis on *'ajā'ib* and *gharā'ib* of the cosmos function to “awe at God's divinely ordered cosmos”.<sup>7</sup> Narrative stories pertaining to the prophets, saints, ancient rulers and nations are also integrated to convey theological and moralistic messages for their audience. In this regard, they remind one the *Kutub al-'azama* (the Books of greatness), a genre describing cosmic phenomena to illustrate the magnificence of God.<sup>8</sup>

Many copies, translations and adaptations of those works became an integral part of the Ottoman literature from the fourteenth century onwards and inspired Ottoman individuals to write down similar works. When we speak of translation in this context, we refer to a broader concept of “translation” where Ottoman translators had certain editorial roles in which they took liberties to make additions and omissions. In this paper, I will be mostly referring to the translations/adaptations in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

The earliest Ottoman translation belongs to 'Alī b. 'Abdu'r-raḥmān. It is a compilation of three cosmographies mentioned above together with some other sources. He also seems to have put forward additional information about Ottoman cities such as Edirne and Bursa.<sup>9</sup> His reference to Edirne as the Ottoman capital<sup>10</sup> reveals that he composed it sometime between 1364–1398.<sup>11</sup>

7 Berlekamp, *Wonder, Image & Cosmos*, 22.

8 Inspired by various Qur'anic verses encouraging believers to reflect (*tafakkur*) on the creation, *Kutub al-'azama* did not deal with the Aristotelian-Ptolemaic model of the cosmos, but concentrated on the cosmological content in the Qur'an and *isrā'iliyyāt*. The earliest works of this genre appeared in the ninth century. For information see A. Heinen, “Tafakkur and Muslim Science”, *JTS*, 18 (1994), 103–110.

9 'Alī b. 'Abdu'r-raḥmān, *Acā'ibü'l-Mahlūkāt*, A.H. 1099/1687. It has only one copy extant in Istanbul University Library of Rare Manuscripts, TY 524. Available online at <http://nek.istanbul.edu.tr:4444/ekos/TY/nekty00524.pdf>

10 For his reference to Edirne see fol. 138b.

11 G. Kut, “Türk Edebiyatı'nda Acâibü'l-Mahlūkât Tercümelere”, *Beşinci Milletlerarası Türko-loji Kongresi Tebliğleri* (Istanbul 1985), 186-187; E. İhsanoğlu (ed.), *Osmanlı Coğrafya Literatürü Tarihi (OCLT); History of Geographical Literature during the Ottoman Period*, Vol.1 (Istanbul 2000), 3.

At the beginning of his work, he claims that what he narrated in his work is a compilation of his readings, observations and personal experiences.<sup>12</sup>

The second one is an abridged translation of at-Ṭūsī's cosmography ascribed to Rükne'd-dīn Aḥmed.<sup>13</sup> He completed the translation upon the request of Sultan Çelebi Mehmed (r. 1413-1421).<sup>14</sup> The third one belongs to Aḥmed-i Bīcān (Yazıcızāde/Yazıcıoğlu), a fifteenth century Ottoman scholar and a mystic from Gallipoli.<sup>15</sup> At the beginning of his work, he asserts that he compiled his work upon the request of Hācı Bayrām Velī in 1453.<sup>16</sup> His translation is one of the most widespread Ottoman cosmographies.<sup>17</sup> It is an abridged version of al-Qazwīnī's *'Ajā'ib al-Makhlūqāt*.

The fourth is the *Dürr-i Meknün*, the most copied Ottoman cosmographical work with more than fifty extant copies.<sup>18</sup> For a long time it had been attributed to Aḥmed-i Bīcān; however, both Laban Kaptein and Carlos Granier drew attention to the fact that there is no convincing evidence to assume that he was the author.<sup>19</sup> Acclaimed to be the first synthetic cosmography in Turkish, the *Dürr-i Meknün*, although not a voluminous work, deals with various topics under eighteen chapters on different aspects of cosmos and its wonders. What is striking is that the author, unlike others, allocated chapters for certain figures such as Solomon, the Queen of Sheba (*Balqīs*) and the Phoenix (*'Anqā'*).

12 'Alī b. 'Abdu'r-raḥmān, *Acā'ibü'l-Makhlūqāt*, fol. 2b.

13 There is no detailed information about the translator. While Kut argues that Arabic phrase 'rukn ad-dīn' (Rükne'd-dīn in Turkish rendition) should be taken as part of the prayer rather than the name of the translator, Engin Yılmaz maintains that it might also indicate the identity of the translator. Kut, "Türk Edebiyatı'nda Acâibü'l-Mahlûkât", 188; E. Yılmaz, "Acâ'ibül-mahlukat: Imla ve ses bilgisi-metin transkripsiyonu", unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Sakarya University, 1998, 12, 289.

14 B. Sarıkaya, "Rükneddin Ahmed'in Acaibü'l-Mahlukat Tercümesi (Giriş-Metin-Sözlük)", unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Marmara University, 2010, 58.

15 He was given the sobriquet "Bīcān" meaning 'lifeless', because of his ascetic way of life. For information, see *TDVİA*, s.v. "Ahmed Bicân" (Â. Çelebioğlu).

16 Aḥmed Bīcān, *'Acā'ibü'l-Makhlūqāt*, Sadberk Hanım Museum Library no. 481-1, fol. 1a.

17 This work has around fifty copies in different libraries of Turkey and the world (e.g. Vatican, Vienna, Berlin, British Museum, Sarajevo, Cairo). See, İhsanoğlu (ed.), *OCLT*, Vol. 1, 4-7.

18 For its editions see Ahmet Bican Yazıcıoğlu, *Dürr-i Meknün: Saklı İnciler*, trans. N. Sakaoglu (Istanbul 1999); idem, *Dürr-i Meknun, Kritische Edition mit Kommentar*, ed. L. Kaptein (Asch 2007); idem, *Dürr-i Meknun*, ed. A. Demirtaş (Istanbul 2010).

19 *Dürr-i Meknün*, ed. Kaptein, 45-47; C. Grenier, "Reassessing the Authorship of the Dürr-i Meknün", *ArchOtt*, 35 (2018), 193-212.

The fifth is a translation of the *Kharīdat al-'Ajā'ib* made by Maḥmūd b. Aḥmed el-Ḥatib at the request of Emīr 'Osmān b. İskender Paşa in 1562-63 (A.H. 970) to familiarize people with Ibn al-Wardī's work.<sup>20</sup> This translation is known under various titles such as *Terceme-i Ḥarīdetül-'Acā'ib*, *'Acā'ibül-Mahlūkāt-ı Türki* and *Nevādirül-Garā'ib ve Mevāridül-'Acā'ib*. Maḥmūd b. Aḥmed's translation stuck fairly closely to the Arabic original, yet he made some additions (e.g. his eye-witness accounts, hearsay and poems) and omissions, as well.<sup>21</sup>

There are of course many other translations, adaptations and synthetical works<sup>22</sup> but in this paper, I focus on these first examples of Ottoman cosmography for a preliminary analysis about how they dealt with wondrous and strange phenomena (*'ajā'ib wa gharā'ib*). In the next steps of my research, I will deepen my analysis by integrating other Ottoman cosmographies of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

## On *'ajā'ib* and *gharā'ib*

*'Ajā'ib* is the plural form of *'ajībah*<sup>23</sup> which literally refers to an object or situation that causes astonishment.<sup>24</sup> Into English, *'ajībah* is either translated as

20 Maḥmūd b. Aḥmed, *Terceme-i Ḥarīdetül-'Acā'ib*, Esad Efendi 2051, fol. 3b.

21 On this work see F. Coşkun, "A Medieval Islamic Cosmography in an Ottoman Context: A Study of Maḥmūd el-Ḥatib's Translation of the *Kharīdat al-'Ajā'ib*", unpublished M.A. thesis, Boğaziçi University, 2007.

22 To have some idea on the Ottoman translations, one can consult to the following articles: Kut, "Türk Edebiyatı'nda Acāibü'l-Mahlūkāt", 183–193; *TDVİA*, "Acāibü'l-Mahlukat" (idem); idem (ed.), "Giriş", *Acāyibül-Mahlūkāt ve Garāyibül-Mevcūdāt (İnceleme-Tıpkıbasım)*, *Süleymaniye Yazma Eserler Kütüphanesi Nuri Arslan Koleksiyonu No.128'deki Nüshanın Tıpkıbasımı* (İstanbul 2012), 9–16; M. Ak, "Osmanlı Coğrafya Çalışmaları", *Türkiye Araştırmaları Literatür Dergisi*, 4:2 (2004), 163–211; M. Sariyannis, "Ajā'ib ve gharā'ib: Ottoman Collections of Mirabilia and Perception of the Supernatural", *Der Islam*, 92:2 (2015), 442–467; F. Coşkun, "Osmanlı Coğrafya Literatürü ve 'Acāibü'l-Mahlūkāt Janrı", *Türkiye Araştırmaları Literatür Dergisi*, 33:17 (2019), 269–286.

23 Since there is no grammatical gender in Persian and Turkish like in Arabic, hereafter *'ajīb* will be preferred instead of *'ajībah* in Persian and Turkish contexts. Likewise, *gharīb* will be used instead of *gharībah*. I thank Dr. Uğur Köroğlu for his suggestion to formulate my rendering in this direction.

24 *EP*, s.v. "Adjā'ib" (C. E. Dubler).

marvel (originating from the Latin word *mirabilis* (pl. *mirabilia*)) or wonder.<sup>25</sup> The term *gharīb* (pl. *gharā'ib*) on the other hand, corresponds to strange and rare entities or oddities.<sup>26</sup> *Gharīb* is regarded as a subset of wonders.<sup>27</sup>

Both European and Islamic literature on wonders and oddities share a common typology of classical heritage as can be observed in the *Historia* by Herodotus, the treatise by Ctesias from Knidos or *Naturalis Historia* by Pliny.<sup>28</sup> Both in the medieval European and Islamic worlds, they were regarded as signs for the portrayal of the omnipotence and the will of God. Some of them were also interpreted as the signs of His wrath or warnings for divine punishment.<sup>29</sup>

In Islamic cosmographical/geographical literature, the derivatives of both *'ajibah* and *gharībah* denote astonishing, admirable and strange aspects of existence both man-made and natural. Among them one can account for buildings of Antiquity (e.g. Pyramids, Pharos of Alexandria), topographical features of nature (i.e. interesting mountains, deserts, lakes, rocks and caves), rare peculiarities of people, minerals, animals and plants.<sup>30</sup> In a similar fashion, various texts produced in Islamic world referred *'ajā'ib* and *gharā'ib* in their titles and contents. *'Ajā'ib al-Hind* by Buzurg b. Shahrīyār (tenth century), *Tuhfat al-albāb wa nukhbat al-'ajā'ib* by Abū Hāmid al-Gharnāṭī (d.1169-70), *Nukhbat al-dahr fi 'ajā'ib al-barr wa'l-baḥr* by al-Dimashqī (d.1327) are only some of them.

In the first part of his *'Ajā'ib al-Makhlūqāt*, al-Qazwīnī defines *'ajab* as a kind of astonishment stemming from one's incapability to understand the cause of something. He relates that each creation has a wondrous aspect, but people lose their curiosity and amazement after their acquaintance with

25 R. P. Mottahedeh, "Ajā'ib in The Thousand and One Nights", in R. G. Hovannisian (ed.), *The Thousand and One Nights in Arabic Literature and Society* (Cambridge 1997), 29; Dubler, s.v. "Adjā'ib"; J. Le Goff, *The Medieval Imagination (l'imaginaire médiéval)*, trans. A. Goldhammer (Chicago – London 1992), 27; K. Park and L. Daston, *Wonders and the Order of Nature, 1150–1750* (New York 2001), 21.

26 *EF*<sup>2</sup>, s.v. "Gharīb" (S.A. Bonebakker).

27 Berlekamp, *Wonder, Image & Cosmos*, 18.

28 A good read on the wonders in the European literature is Park and Daston, *Wonders and the Order of Nature*.

29 Park and Daston, *Wonders and the Order of Nature*, 40–51.

30 *EF*<sup>2</sup>, s.v. "Adjā'ib".

objects or events, except in cases where they meet with the unfamiliar.<sup>31</sup> As regards *gharīb*, he defined it as a strange thing or incident that occasionally transpired either through the intervention of God or of eminent figures such as prophets, saints and sages to whom God granted such ability. Among *gharā'ib*, he provides accounts of miracles or spiritual effects of prophets, saints and sages, climatic and geological events (i.e. comets, eclipses, earthquakes), plants, animals and minerals with bizarre peculiarities and talismans.<sup>32</sup>

In the Qur'an, *'ajībah* relates to the astonishment of both believers and unbelievers at the deeds of God, with which they are unfamiliar or human ignorance with regard to the scale of God's capability and might.<sup>33</sup> In other words, astonishment comes to the fore as a state of mind resulting from alarm at events beyond the realm of experience or predictive human knowledge.

In modern scholarly literature, those geographical and cosmological works referring to *'ajā'ib* and *gharā'ib* are categorized as a genre of "classical Islamic literature" so called genre of *'ajā'ib* or *'ajā'ib al-makhlūqāt*.<sup>34</sup> Syrinx von Hees has problematized this classification arguing that it reduced the meaning of *'ajā'ib* and *gharā'ib* to encompass only fantastic entities<sup>35</sup> and associated the so-called genre with the Islamic "decadence" of scientific activity which is considered to have commenced in the twelfth century.<sup>36</sup> As a challenge to this kind of conceptualization, she argued that both terms were in fact used mostly to denote real phenomena, rather than fantastic or fictional.<sup>37</sup> Moreover von Hees pointed out *'ajā'ib*'s incentive role to make further quests about diversity

31 See the earliest extant copy in Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Munich under BSB Cod. Arab cod. 464 (pdf page no. 9). Cf. Al-Qazwini, *Die Wunder des Himmels und der Erde*, 26.

32 Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Munich under BSB Cod. Arab cod. 464 (pdf page no. 17).

33 See Qur'anic verses 11:72–73; 37:12–14; 38:4; 50:2; 53:55.

34 *EP*, s.v. "Adjā'ib"; T. Fahd, «Le merveilleux dans la faune, la flore et les minéraux», dans M. Arkoun (éd.), *L'étrange et le merveilleux dans l'Islam médiéval* (Paris 1978), p. 119; *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, s.v. "Ajā'eb al-Makhlūqāt" (C.E. Bosworth).

35 S. von Hees, "The Astonishing: A Critique and Re-reading of 'Ağā'ib Literature", *Middle Eastern Literatures*, 8:2 (2005), 101–120.

36 Von Hess, "The Astonishing", 105.

37 Von Hees showed that when the authors of those texts wanted to refer to something unbelievable or implausible, they use terms such as *khurāfa* (Ar. "superstition") or *dorūgh* (Per. "lie"). It is rarely that *'ajā'ib* or *gharā'ib* are used for unreal phenomena and that is mostly for rhetorical purposes. *Ibid.*, "The Astonishing", 111. Travis Zadeh's article is also quite illuminating on this matter. See T. Zadeh, "The Wiles of Creation: Philosophy, Fiction and the 'Acā'ib Tradition", *Middle Eastern Literatures*, 13 (2010), 21–48.



of nature<sup>38</sup> and the cosmography of al-Qazwīnī is in fact an encyclopedia of natural history with a philosophical and scientific outlook.<sup>39</sup> Although not in line with von Hees' remarks on the "genre",<sup>40</sup> Berlekamp supported her argument that 'ajā'ib and gharā'ib phenomena mostly correspond to what was considered to be "real" and thus not to be reduced to imaginary or fantastic. She furthermore underlined the fact it would be misleading to elaborate wonders through polarities (e.g. religious vs. scientific; fantastic vs. real).<sup>41</sup> This approach supports Sariyannis's remark that wonders in the Ottoman world were not imagined contrary to nature but conceived more like preternatural, i.e. obeying to natural laws as set by God but in ways unknown to the human intellect.<sup>42</sup> In his "Wonder in early modern Ottoman society", Ido Ben Ami with a reference to Barbara H. Rosenwein's notion of "emotional communities" remarked that Ottoman authors although living in different time periods, were using a common vocabulary for wonders because they were part of the same emotional community.<sup>43</sup> Scrutinizing the wondrous and strange world of

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38 Von Hees, "The Astonishing", 105-106.

39 Idem, *Enzyklopädie als Spiegel des Weltbildes: Qazwīnīs Wunder der Schöpfung – eine Naturkunde des 13. Jahrhunderts* (Wiesbaden 2002); idem, "Al-Qazwīnī's 'Ajā'ib al-makhlūqāt: An Encyclopaedia of Natural History?", in G. Endress (ed.), *Organizing Knowledge: Encyclopaedic Activities in the Pre-Eighteenth Century Islamic World* (Leiden – Boston 2006), 171–186.

40 "But when it comes to whether or not there is any justification in speaking of a medieval Islamic 'ajā'ib genre, it is crucially important to recognize that the criteria by which we now decide whether or not something is wondrous, are not the same as the criteria used by medieval Islamic authors." Berlekamp, *Wonder, Image & Cosmos*, 25.

41 "Today, we define wonder and wonders through post-Enlightenment polarities such as religious-scientific, fantastical-real, and legendary-historical. These polarities are basic to our thought, because they are also the polarities through which we define reality. But these polarities were not always used to define either wonder or reality, in the Islamic world or elsewhere. For this reason, the historical investigation of wonder and wonders in general has the potential to help us break through the historicity of our own concepts of reality. And indeed, even though this may sound like an elusive goal, this is one of the pressing problems that scholars of culture face today. Having rejected single, positivist history based on a modern, empiricist concept of reality, scholars of culture now face a new problem. We need to define historically specific alternatives to the old model in constructive rather than in deconstructive terms." Berlekamp, *Wonder, Image & Cosmos*, 8.

42 Sariyannis, "Ajā'ib ve gharā'ib", 442–467.

43 I. Ben-Ami, "Wonder in early modern Ottoman society", *History Compass*, 17:7 (2019), 1–12.

Evliya Çelebi, Yeliz Ö. Diniz analyzed how Evliyâ's famous travelogue reflected the "episteme" of the seventeenth century Ottoman world. While she dwelled on Evliyâ's various skills of story-telling, she aptly expresses how his '*ajâ'ib* and *gharâ'ib* pertain to astonishment felt at the face of admiring situations and events of reality.<sup>44</sup> Her analysis is successful in elaborating how even in a single work, it is difficult to determine the meaning and scope of '*ajâ'ib* and *gharâ'ib* and there is much work to be done in this direction. Keeping this fact in mind, what do Ottoman examples tell us about the '*ajâ'ib* phenomena? If we take the first Ottoman cosmographies (whether abridged/ free or full translations /adaptations or synthetical work) into account, what can we infer from them concerning what was '*ajib* and *gharib* for Ottoman audience? Below are my preliminary remarks for the early examples of Ottoman cosmography/ geographical literature.

### **'Ajâ'ib and gharâ'ib in the early examples of Ottoman geographical literature**

One comes across various Ottoman manuscripts having '*ajâ'ib* and *gharâ'ib* in their titles. Among them are the works of exegesis,<sup>45</sup> history,<sup>46</sup> mysticism,<sup>47</sup> and literature.<sup>48</sup> Yet, more than others, Arabic/Persian copies and Turkish translations of the cosmographies of at-Ṭūsī, al-Qazwīnī and Ibn al-Wardī are substantial. What can we say for the motivations of the Ottoman authors/ translators to learn about '*ajâ'ib* and *gharâ'ib* of the world? Passages in the aforementioned Turkish examples provide some hints.

In Rükne'd-dīn Aḥmed's *Acâ'ibü'l-Mahlukât*, it is expressed that all wonders of existence were compiled so whoever read or hear about them would contemplate (*tafakkur*) about God and revere (*ta'zīm*) Him. Contemplation

44 "...Evliyâ Çelebi'nin 'acayip' and 'garip' terimlerini kullanmasının sebebi 'olağanüstülük' karşısındaki 'şaşkınlık' etkisini yaratmak değil, tam aksine gerçeklik düzlemindeki 'hayranlık duyulacak' durumlar ya da olaylar karşısında duyulan 'şaşkınlık' etkisini yaratmaktır." Y. Özay Diniz, *Evliya Çelebi'nin Acayip ve Garip Dünyası* (Istanbul 2017), 27.

45 Tāj al-Ḳurrā' Maḥmud b. Ḥamza al-Kirmānī, *'Ajâ'ib al-Garâ'ib fī Tafsi'ri'l-Ḳur'an*.

46 Shihāb ad-dīn Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Ḥalebī ibn Arab-shāh, *'Ajâ'ib al-Makdūr fī Navāib-i Timur*. This work dwells on the reign of Tamerlane and the rivalry between his successors.

47 Muḥammad 'Abdullāh al-Kisāi, *'Ajâ'ib al-Malakūt*.

48 Aḥmad b. Hamdam, Suhaylī, *'Ajâ'ib al-Maāsir wa Garâ'ib an-Navādir*.

about God's creation is even defined as a more pious act than one's praying to Allah.<sup>49</sup> Fear of God is also intended to be invoked in readers' hearts<sup>50</sup> and people are advised to have faith (*i'tikād*) in the existence of 'ajā'ib since Allāh is omnipotent and he do as he wishes.<sup>51</sup> The text suggests that 'ajā'ib is beyond human comprehension.<sup>52</sup> If one were to examine for oneself, one would see a thousand kinds of 'ajā'ib, so the unity and might of God would be self-evident.<sup>53</sup> Both *Dürr-i Mekkün*<sup>54</sup> and Maḥmūd b. Aḥmed's translation convey similar remarks.<sup>55</sup> Below are my observations concerning the form and content of the first examples of (so-called) '*Ajā'ib al-Makhlūqat*' genre in Turkish.

### a) Form

The Ottoman texts in question are full of plural forms of '*ajibah*' and '*gharibah*': So, '*acā'ib*', '*acā'ibāt*'/'*acā'ibler*' (double plural) or '*garā'ib*' in Turkish. A very common phrase all along the texts is "... '*acā'ibindendir*'", one of its '*ajā'ib*' (similar to "*min al-ajā'ib*" in Arabic). In some works, tales of wondrous and strange phenomena are recounted in the form of subsections titled '*ucūbe*', '*hikāyet-i garibe*' and '*hikāyet-i acibe*'.<sup>56</sup> The term '*acā'ibraḥ*' is also used for more astonishing objects or situations. For example, in *Acā'ibü'l-Mahlūkāt* of

49 Rükne'd-din, *Acā'ibü'l-Mahlūkāt*, Ali Emiri T.897, fols. 3b, 5a, 8b.

50 "Denizün 'acā'ibleri çokdur, vaşfa gelmez biz dahî bu denizleri şundan ötürü yazduk ki Hâk Te'älâ'nun 'azameti ve celâli korkusu anun gönlinde ziyâde ola." Ibid., fols. 56b-57a.

51 Idem, *Acā'ibü'l-Mahlūkāt*, Ali Emiri T.897, fol. 13b. Along the text, one might find our similar remarks in this direction: "Allahu Te'älâ'nun kudretinden 'acib degüldür" or "Hâk Te'älâ'nın kudreğine 'acib değıldir..." Ibid., fols 28a-b.

52 Ibid., fol. 220a.

53 "Kendi özine naḡar itsün ta hezâr dürlü 'acā'ibler göre. Allāhu Te'älâ'nun birliğini ve 'azametini bile." Ibid., fol. 83b.

54 "Pes yaratdı 'arşı ve kürsi ve gökleri ve yirleri ve bunların içinde olan 'acāyibi ve feriştehleri ve uçmağı ve tımuı ve yirdeki 'acāyibi ve deñizleri ve rub<sup>c</sup>-ı meskünı ve tağları ve aḡarşuları ve geçerätı ve emläki ve cinni ve insi tã kim ḡalıkuñ kudretin ve 'azametin bileler, zıkr ideler, aña 'ibâdet ideler." *Dürr-i Mekkün*, Demirtaş (ed.), 89. For the quotations from this edition, henceforth *DM*.

55 "Allāh'ın kendi şan'at-ı 'acibesine ve kudret-i garibesine tefekkür eyleyüb 'ibret almakda bize ve size tevfiḡ eylesin", meaning "May God make us successful to reflect on His wondrous art and unique might and draw lessons from them". Maḥmūd b. Aḥmed, *Terceme-i Ḥaridetü'l-Acā'ib*, Nuruosmaniye 2999, fol. 143b.

56 This is especially apparent in *Acā'ibü'l-Mahlūkāt* of Rükne'd-din Aḥmed.

Rükne'd-dîn Aḥmed, the Moon and the Sun are depicted as more wondrous than other things and since people got used to see them all the time, they became unwary of their wondrous nature.<sup>57</sup>

## 1. Use of *'ajā'ib* and *gharā'ib* in pairs:

It is striking that *'ajā'ib* and *gharā'ib* are sometimes employed in the same phrase as pairs, mostly likely to bestow a sense of rhyme. For example, while discussing his sources, 'Alī b. 'Abdu'r-raḥmān claims that he compiled his *'Acā'ibü'l-Mablūkāt* from strange news and sections on wondrous (*haberlerin garā'ibinden, faşılların 'acā'ibinden...*).<sup>58</sup>

The use of *'ajā'ib* and *gharā'ib* in conjunction seems to be especially prominent in the description of ancient cities. Here are some examples:

- *'acā'ibden ve garā'ibden binālar* (for ancient buildings)
- *teşāvir-i garībe, temāsil-i 'acībe* (for ancient pictures, images or statues)
- *'acā'ib-i dehr, garā'ib-i 'aşr* (for the antiquity)
- *āşār-ı 'acībe şanā'i-i garībe* (for mostly for buildings in ancient cities)
- *heyākil-i 'acībe ve teşāvir-i garībe* (for ancient statues or images, depictions)
- *āşār-ı 'acībe ve garībeler* (for the remains of ancient cities)
- *āşār-ı garā'ibler ve teşāvir-i 'acā'ibler* (for ancient buildings or depictions)

## 2. Company of eulogical phrases:

Occasionally astonishing, admirable and terrifying aspects of existence qualified as wondrous or strange are accompanied by phrases praising God such as “*Allāhu Akbar*”, “*fa-subḥān-allāh al-Ḳādir al-Khallāk*”, “*Wa'llāhu 'alam*”, “*Allāh'in dediği olur*” or by the Qur'ānic verses about the utmost capacity of God. They seem to be integrated into the text to denote how *'ajā'ib* and *gharā'ib* are illustrative of God's omnipotence.

57 “Bilmek gerek ki aydan ve güneşden 'acā'ibraḳ 'ālemdə nesne yokdur, ammā ādemī anları dāim görmegisin 'acā'ibliğinden gāfil olur.” Rükne'd-dîn Aḥmed, *'Acā'ibü'l-Mablūkāt*, Ali Emiri T.897, fol. 30b.

58 'Alī b. 'Abdu'r-raḥmān, *'Acā'ibü'l-Mablūkāt*, fol. 2a.

## b) Meaning

There is no fixed use of *'ajīb* and *gharīb* in the Ottoman examples of cosmographical/geographical content. Both terms are used interchangeably for wondrous, miraculous, rare and strange. In other words, their usage is not strictly drawn, rather its scope is inclusive of one another. For example, *gharīb* does not necessarily mean something that occurs through the intervention of a divine power or influence (in al-Qazwīnī's words) but it can also be a man-made or natural wonder or simply an astonishing or interesting thing that deserves admiration. It is frequently coupled with *ṣan'at* (artisanship). For example, the term *ṣan'at-ı garībe* is used for a special textile production; or animals like elephants and giraffes in China were also defined as *gharīb*. Here are dichotomic categories to keep in mind while we think about the phenomena.

close/central/local/	vs.	far/periphery/fringe/liminal/frontier
familiar/known/civilized	vs.	unfamiliar/exotic/ barbarous/uncivilized/foreign
comprehensible	vs.	incomprehensible/hidden/secret

One could also play with these categories to determine how they work for descriptions of wonder in the Ottoman texts, e.g. close vs. exotic; comprehensible vs. unfamiliar. So, it is best not to define them strictly in contrast to each other.

### 1. Inaccessibility, beyond human reach:

Since the whole cosmos is perceived as the reflection of God's omnipotence and wisdom, wondrous aspects of His creation are noted in every realm of existence: The heavens and the earth; close and distant geographies; visible or invisible; accessible or inaccessible. Some wondrous and strange things are described to be beyond human reach (e.g. the heavenly realms, Mt. Qāf and Water of Life).

It might be surprising but in the descriptions of the heavens, with their gigantic cosmic entities such as the Throne of God (*al-'arsh*), the Tablet (*al-lawḥ*), the Footstool (*al-kursī*), there is less use of *ajā'ib* and *gharā'ib* than in those describing earthly entities. Although they are much grandeur in appearance and more "extraordinary", one would not observe very explicit usage of *'ajīb* and *gharīb* in their descriptions. This does not mean that they are not astonishing or admiring. Surely they are. But they are not especially characterized with the derivatives of *'ajībah* and *gharībah*. But the case of Paradise seems to be

different. It is noted for its wondrous mountains, trees, rivers and palaces.<sup>59</sup> Among them are a wine that flows in the direction of people's movement<sup>60</sup> or a kind of wine called *tesnīm* that refills itself by its own nature.<sup>61</sup> The Sun and Moon are also counted amongst the '*ajā'ib*, with specially stress placed on the function of the Sun for nature and human survival.<sup>62</sup>

Only some legendary/mythical/religious figures such as Jesus, Khidr, Alexander, and Muḥammad (mostly in reference to his *mi'raj*, ascension to Heavens) set foot in the realms beyond ordinary human reach. They are treated as the "constant travelers" who witnessed the wonders of the universe.<sup>63</sup> The '*ajā'ib* of inaccessible realms are verified through their experiences. In other words, the veracity of wonders is authenticated via their observations or experiences. This provides the impression that only extraordinary figures are privy to extraordinary phenomena. And perhaps implicit within this is the relevance of the composition of "wonder-books." Because they talk about things that not everyone can easily gain access to. For example, in the *Dürr-i Meknün*, Alexander encounters the angel (*ferište*) who is the custodian of the legendary Mt. Qāf, the greatest of all mountains which surrounds the Encircling Ocean and the inhabited world (*rub'-ı meskün*). As a globe-trotter, Alexander asks the angel about her duties. As the angel begins narrating, the reader learns how earthquakes occur. The angel declares that the roots of all mountains are connected to Mt. Qāf and under its control. Whenever God desires for an earthquake to occur in a specific region, the mountain pulls the root connected to that area and the earthquake rattles that specific location.<sup>64</sup>

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59 *DM*, 139.

60 *DM*, 98.

61 "Anuñ 'acāyibi bu kim bir қадеһ içсеñ boş olduқда havādan cezb ider yine топтолу olur." *DM*, 101. This reminds one the Qur'ānic verse referring to *Tasnīm* as a spring in the Paradise drunken by those close to God. See 83: 27–28.

62 "Göklerüñ 'acāyibinden biri bu güneşdür ki 'āleme ziyā virür. Şoñra nebātā ve fevākihe terbiyyet viren bu güneşdür. Allāhu ta'ālānuñ emriyile yirden şuyı cezb ider, yağmurlar yağdurur. Allāhu ta'ālā aña bu hāşıyyeti virmişdür." *DM*, 105.

63 Rükne'd-din Aḥmed, *Acā'ibü'l-Mahlūkāt*, Ali Emiri T. 897, fol. 4a; *DM*, 150.

64 *DM*, 130, 135.

## 2. Wonders of the earth

As regards the earth, various aspects of its flora, fauna and inhabitants are also characterized among '*ajā'ib* and *gharā'ib*. For example, China is noted to be a place of wonders with its cities filled with strange animals such as elephants, giraffes and rhinoceros.<sup>65</sup> In the entry for Umman, when a snake called *sekrān* is caught and made captive it becomes invisible and no one knows where it disappears.<sup>66</sup> An interesting apple, half sweet, half sour is attributed to Istakhr in Iran.<sup>67</sup> In one of the copies of Aḥmed-i Bīcān's abridged translation, one comes across with a marginal note. It is an example how contemporary readers might contribute to the collection of '*ajā'ib* from their own milieu. The main text, having discussed the springs in Jurjan, makes mention of a fountain known as the Waters of Starling (Tr. Sığircık) between Isfahan and Shiraz. It is said that starlings like the water there and wherever one spills water, starlings arrive and feed on any locusts in the vicinity. The marginal note, (handwriting different than the scribe) claims that Kastamonu also collected some water from there and brought it to his hometown of İskilib (*kātibü'l-ḥurūf*). According to the note, in this town, starlings flew to the water to drink it and when they stayed in the town, the locusts disappeared.<sup>68</sup>

## 3. The self and the other in the faraway and exotic

Wonders are everywhere. Yet, the most wondrous and strange entities seem to be found on the islands of the Encircling Ocean (*Baḥr-ı Muḥiṭ cezireleri*). The entities found here consist of hybrid creatures, djinns, demons and plants, animals and minerals with bizarre peculiarities. For example, a specific fish,

65 Ali b. 'Abdu'r-raḥmān, *Acā'ibü'l-Maḥlūḳāt*, fol. 103a.

66 "Ve ānda ['Ummān] bir nev' yılān olur sekrān dirler. Lākin ziyān itmez eğer bu yılānı bir bardağa ve yāhūd bir gayri zarfa koyub dahī azgın muhkem bağlasalar ve bu zarfı dahī bir āhar kaba koysalar ol vilāyetten çıktıkları gibi bu yılān ol kāb içinden nā-bed'id olur. Kande gitdüğün kimse bilmez ve bu hikmet gāyet 'acā'ibdendir." Maḥmūd b. Ḥatib, *Terceme-i Ḥaridetü'l-'Acā'ib*, Esad Efendi 2051, fols. 51a–51b.

67 "... ve İştāḥr'da bir dürlü elma var ki dünyānun 'acā'ibindendir. Bir yanı ekşi olur begāyet ve bir yanı tatludur." Ali b. 'Abdu'r-raḥmān, *Acā'ibü'l-Maḥlūḳāt*, fol. 84b.

68 "Vilāyet-i Rüm'da Kastamonu sancağına tabi Ers (?) nahiyesinde dahı vardır. Sığircık suyu Kātibü'l-Hurūf kendü mevlid olan İskilib'e getürdiler. Sığircıklar geldüler çekirgeleri def ettiler, gördük deyü rivāyet eder. Zikrolunan suyu İskilib'de Cami'i-ı Kebir'e asmışlardır. Hala durur." Aḥmed-i Bīcān, *Terceme-i 'Acā'ibü'l-Maḥlūḳāt*, Hacı Beşir Ağa 656, fol. 6a.

namely *saḳanḳur* is reported to have rejuvenating effect over those touch it.<sup>69</sup> A wondrous rabbit-like animal (*'acīb cānevār*) yellow in colour with a dark horn is also mentioned as a scary animal making all predators and wild animals run away. It appears as one of the wondrous presents and strange rarities (*hedāyā-yı 'acībe ve tuhfe-i garibe*) given to Alexander by the people of the island Müstekīn (?) when he saved them from a dragon.<sup>70</sup>

In addition, their inhabitants are also characterized by strange forms, in some cases they are hybrids (e.g. cynocephali, boneless and slip-footed nations and flying people) or have undesirable features such as being savage, aggressive, nude, cannibal, licentious, irreligious and non-compliant. The description of the isles in the *Dürr-i Mecnûn* deserves special consideration because it reveals a lot about the various island communities who were ignorant to the ideas of the oneness of God, chastity, mourning, respect for one's relatives and the elderly.<sup>71</sup> In the translation of Maḥmūd b. Aḥmed, the Island of Zanj is said to be inhabited by people who fly like birds from one tree to another,<sup>72</sup> the Island of Caye by people whose faces are on their chests,<sup>73</sup> the Island of Saḳsar by dog-headed and slip-footed creatures.<sup>74</sup> In the *Dürr-i Mecnûn*, the beautiful women of Zatu'l-İtlāk, a city close to India are portrayed as being liberated enough to be able to approach foreign men without any problems from their own men who are described as ugly.<sup>75</sup> On the Island of Women (*Ceziretü'n-nisā*) women become pregnant either by the wind or by eating the fruit of a certain tree. This description is followed by an incantation: "I seek shelter in God, the way of the birth and the intercourse is marvelous and how it is done is strange."<sup>76</sup> and two Quranic verses (22:6 and 22:70) on the omnipotence of God.<sup>77</sup> Such descriptions in the far-off places can tell about the imagining of

69 *DM*, 182.

70 Maḥmūd b. Aḥmed, *Terceme-i Harîdetü'l-'Acā'ib*, Esad Efendi 2051, fols 79a–79b.

71 See especially *DM*, 142–144.

72 "... anun ḥalkı ağaçdan ağaca kuş gibi uçarlar, bu 'aceb-i ḥikmet ve sırr-ı kudretidir." Maḥmūd b. Aḥmed, *Terceme-i Harîdetü'l-'Acā'ib*, Bratislava copy 429, fol. 128v.

73 *Ibid.*, fol. 145r.

74 *Ibid.*, fols. 171r.–174r.

75 *DM*, 150.

76 "Fe-subḥān-allāhu'l-'azīm zükür-ile muḳārenet olmadın tevālüd ve tenāsül olduğu emr-i 'acib ve fi'l-i garibdir." Maḥmūd b. Aḥmed, *Terceme-i Harîdetü'l-'Acā'ib*, Esad Efendi 2051, fols. 74a–74b.

77 *Ibid.*



the self and others. When astonishment is invoked for bizarre traits of others, the audience might be expected to be grateful for its own conditions, i.e. living in Islamdom, not being part of those communities who had extraordinary customs, and conditions. But on the other hand, one might also feel a kind of “envy” or “desire” for certain wonders such as the wondrous rejuvenating effect of *sakanķur* or beautiful islander women who are easily able to engage in intercourse with strangers.

#### 4. Capacity of the bygone civilizations

The bygone prosperity of ancient civilizations, especially the ornamented and elaborate buildings of antiquity, (i.e. towers, temples, bridges or statues) are also counted among the wonders and oddities. These are mostly man-made rather than natural wonders. Egypt, Babylon, Constantinople,<sup>78</sup> Alexandria<sup>79</sup> are especially noted with regard to their ancient monuments and talismans. For example, the Pyramids are described as mysterious artifacts filled with wonders and oddities such as carved models of the stars that show all things that happened in the past and will happen in the future; or stone coffins on which prophecies of fortune tellers are imprinted.<sup>80</sup> One of the most striking wonders is the tower (*mināre*) of Alexandria, the portion of which was covered by one thousand and one mirrors (*āyine-i cihān-nümā*) that could burn enemy ships through its reflection of sunlight.<sup>81</sup> In the *Dürr-i Mekkün*, this tower appears in Constantinople.<sup>82</sup>

The *Dürr-i Mekkün* referred to the Temple of Solomon (*Bayt al-Maqdis*) as the most wondrous place of worship, a perfect temple in every respect. In a biblical story featuring David and Solomon, the temple is presented as

78 As the capital of Byzantine Empire, the city is mentioned with regard to its protective talismans, columns, hippodrome, the imperial palace and Hagia Sophia. Cf. Rükne'd-din Aĥmed, Ali Emiri T. 897, fol. 126b; cf. 'Alī b. 'Abdu'r-raĥmān, '*Acā'ibü'l-Maĥlūkāt*, fols. 137b–138b; *DM*, 154.

79 Alexandria for example is noted for its grid plan. “...*Ve bu ŷehrün evleri ve bāzārları 'acā'ib hendeseyle yapmışdur İskender riķ'a-ı satranc miŷāl üzerine.*” Rükne'd-din Aĥmed, '*Acā'ibü'l-Maĥlūkāt*, Ali Emiri T. 897, fol. 63b.

80 Maĥmūd b. Aĥmed, *Terceme-i Harīdetü'l-'Acā'ib*, Nuruosmaniye 2999, fols 24b–25a.

81 *Ibid.*, fol. 20b.

82 *DM*, 154. For Yerasimos's remarks on this point see S. Yerasimos, *Légendes d'Empire: La fondation de Constantinople et de Sainte-Sophie dans les traditions turques* (Paris 1990).

having been built not only with man-power but also by djinns, demons and fairies who carried beautiful marbles, columns, gold, silver and diamonds for it from all over the world. The reign of Solomon is noted for its many wonders. Through the seal of universal rulership brought down for him from Paradise, Solomon is depicted as having an extraordinary capacity to rule over animals, fairies, djinns and demons. He had a wondrous throne carried by the winds and with the ability to travel at great speed.<sup>83</sup>

Similar cities of antiquity, medieval Muslim cities such as Cordoba or Baghdad are also mentioned in admiring terms. For example, the architectural aspects of a monastery in Andalusia are described as “*şavmâ'a-ı 'acibe ve haceri-garibe*” whereas a bridge in Cordoba as “*bir 'acib ve tavri garib köprü*”<sup>84</sup>

## 5. Miracles

Many prophetic and saintly miracles (e.g. God's resurrection of the dead upon Abraham's special request for it) are counted among the '*ajâ'ib*'.<sup>85</sup> Yet, unlike al-Qazwîni's definition of *gharîb*, not every divine intervention or prophetic/saintly miracles are defined as *gharîb*. They are mostly referred to as '*ajâ'ib*' or simply referred to be miracles. The Prophet Muḥammad's alleged splitting of the Moon is an example.<sup>86</sup> The miraculous story of the Seven Sleepers is also accounted among '*ajâ'ib*'.<sup>87</sup> But perhaps it is because it is referred to in this way in the Qur'ân (18:9): “Or dost thou think the Men of the Cave and Er-Rakeem were among Our signs, a wonder?”<sup>88</sup>

### c) Wonderment

Wonderment is expressed through different phrases. The most frequent ones are as follows: “*ta'accüb etmek*”<sup>89</sup>, *'acebe kalıb müteḥayyir olmak*, *nazar edip*

83 *DM*, 157-158; 164, 166.

84 Maḥmūd b. Aḥmed, *Terceme-i Harîdetü'l-'Acâ'ib*, Nuruosmaniye 2999, fol. 13b.

85 Rükne'd-dîn Aḥmed, *'Acâ'ibü'l-Maḥlûkât*, Ali Emiri T. 897, fol. 4a.

86 “Tâ ḥaddî ki bu 'alâmeti Çin ü Mâçin'de ve Hindüstân'da gördiler ki ay iki pâre oldu, ana vardılar, târiḥ ḳodılar, sonra mu'cizât-ı Muḥammed imiş bildiler.” Rükne'd-dîn Aḥmed, *'Acâ'ibü'l-Maḥlûkât*, Ali Emiri T. 897, fols 32a; Cf. *DM*, 107.

87 *DM*, 201.

88 A. Arberry, *The Koran interpreted* (London 1955), Vol. 1, 316.

89 When Nimrod witnesses the fire transformed into a rose garden instead of burning Abraham. “Ve daḥî Nemrüd-ı la'în İbrâhim 'aleyhi's-selâmi oda atıcaḳ, od aña gülistân oldu.

*hayrān kalmak*, 'aceb temāşā kılmak'. To exemplify this, people were claimed to have been astonished when a global earthquake occurred on the day Prophet Muḥammad was born and the domes of the Christian churches collapsed and the fires of the Zoroastrians were miraculously extinguished.<sup>90</sup> Another anecdote concerns Caliph al-Ma'mūn and his attempt to demolish the greatest pyramid which incurred a high expense for him. As recounted in the story, he discovers a large hoard of gold among the ruins of the demolished(!) pyramid. When the value of the treasure was estimated, it emerged that it matched exactly what he had spent on the destruction of the pyramid, and this rendered him astonished (*ta'acciüb itdi*).<sup>91</sup> The story implicitly depicts the Caliph's act of destruction as one of piety. His discovery of the gold is representative of a re-payment by God in return for his pious acts. It functions as an illustration of God repaying the value of one's effort for something, a common motif in the Qur'ān.

## Concluding remarks

Examination of 'ajīb and gharīb in early modern Ottoman texts provides exciting new frontiers for exploration, i.e. to investigate how the cosmos was envisioned by past generations, how typologies of wonder are traced back to ancient times, how ancient arts and architecture were met with astonishment or admiration, and how prophetic tales ensure God's justice. The cosmos and most of its aspects are undeniably wondrous; but those aspects beyond the realm of one's immediate access seem especially more wondrous. All those wondrous hybrid creatures, or nations with strange customs generally appear to be located in distant geographies. It may not be a coincidence that this manifests linguistically and that the words 'outlandish' and 'far-out' are also synonyms for 'bizarre'. This does not imply that there are no wonders in the

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Nemrūd anı gördi ta'acciüb eyledi." *DM*, 177.

90 "Kaçan kim Hızret-i Rasūlullāh 'am dünyāya gelicek şeytān-ı la'ini ḥabs itdiler. 'Alemdē zelzele oldu. Kılısalaruñ kübbeleri aşığa yire geçdi. Putları ser-nügün oldu. Ol od kim Mecūsiler aña tıparlardı, gice ve gündüz yanardı. Şeytān 'aleyhi 'l-la'ne od içine girüp ḥazīn āvāz-ile kāfirlere ivā iderdı. Ol gice sögündi. Tāk-ı kisrīyle 'Acem şahınuñ dīvān-ḥānesi çatlayup niçesinüñ 'aklı başından gitdi... Ol gice bir 'alāmet oldu ki ḥalk-ı 'ālem ta'acciübe kalup müteḥayyir oldılar." *DM*, 127.

91 Maḥmūd b. Aḥmed, *Terceme-i Harīdetü'l-'Acā'ib*, Nuruosmaniye 2999, fol. 25a.

nearby geographies. The half-sour, half-sweet apples of Istahr or the wondrous talismans of Constantinople are evidence of this. But the “distant nature of wonders” is far more striking. When I speak of distance, I do not necessarily mean only distant in terms of space but also in time and culture. The ancient wonders of the Mediterranean or wonders of Byzantine Constantinople for example; they are distant in time and culture. Or should I say distinctive? What is distant in space, time and culture seem to be treated distinctive, dissimilar, distinguishable, therefore more worthy of direct one’s attention to. So, the audience may feel perplexed and astonished in the face of God’s omnipotence and magnificence. As the reader contemplates these wonders, they can realize how diverse His creation is, how unexpected, and how interesting it is. And in some cases, the reader is confronted with how wonders are beyond the scope of their physical and mental “access.” When the audience learns about them through the cosmographical texts, in their religious imagination, God becomes even more praiseworthy, more admirable and more magnificent. This seems to be an essential function of ‘*ajā’ib* and *gharā’ib* in these texts.

Yet, wonders are also about “enchanting” one’s own environment. Maḥmūd b. Aḥmed integrated various examples into his translation based on his hearsay and personal experiences.<sup>92</sup> Sariyannis examined a similar case also for other Ottoman figures such as Cinānī. Just to add one more example; the aforementioned marginal note in Aḥmed-i Bīcān’s *Terceme-i ‘Acā’ibül-Mablūkāt* demonstrates that some wonders are even transmittable from one place to another, along with their wondrous functions. Such examples reveal that the wonders noted for “distant” geographies, time frames and cultures may also manifest in the “here” and “now”. This is not a far-fetched possibility. Because everything is possible in God’s realm. This assertion would convince the audience that wonders are also a part of their daily reality.

What I have shared above are merely some preliminary explorations of the current state of my research. Surely, the analysis will be broadened in the subsequent steps when more texts from later periods are elaborated.

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92 F. Coşkun, “An Ottoman preacher’s perception of a medieval cosmography: Maḥmūd al-Ḥaṭīb’s translation of the *Kharīdat al-‘Ajā’ib wa Farīdat al-Gharā’ib*”, *Al-Masaq: Islam and Mediterranean*, 23 (2011), 53–66.