

D. Sources

Examples of translated materials for the study of Ottoman occultism IV

The mystic cosmology of a late eighteenth-century scholar. Excerpts from İbrahim Hakkı Erzurumî's (d. 1780) *Mā'rifetnâme*:

The components of the world of *melekūt* and the world of bodies, that is the fourteen kinds of souls and the fifteen classes of bodies, amount to the twenty-nine letters. Just like names, verbs and words that form the foundation of human speech come from the arrangement of letters, so do from the arrangement of these components (*müfredāt*) of the two worlds come three sorts of composite bodies (*ecsām-i mürekkebe*): minerals, plants and animals. In their turn, the three composite bodies coming from the components of the two worlds form innumerable meanings in the book of the world...

The four elements turn first into smoke, vapour and dust (*edhine ve buhārāt ve 'aşārāta istiḥāle ve tebdil* eder). Smoke comes from the fineness of the earth, and under the sun's heat raises and mixes with the air. Vapour belongs to the fineness of water, of the seas and rivers, and under the sun's heat it raises and mixes with the air in its turn. Smoke and vapour are half-composite and form the atmosphere (*kā'ināt-i cevvi-i semā'*) ... As for the dust of the water, this is snow and rain. When they draw back to the interiors of the earth, they mix with its components (*eczā'-yi arzīyye*)

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and thicken. With the sun's heat, which reaches the deeps of the earth, these thick fluids boil and form the material of minerals, plants and animals... Thus, the first degree of this universe is thick earth, whereas the highest one are the visible spirits [angels: *nefs-i zāhire*] and they are very fine. For the first of the minerals is adjoining the earth and water, its last adjoins the plants; the first of the plants adjoins the minerals and its last the animals; and as the first of the animals adjoins the plants, its last reaches man. The first human spirit adjoins the animal, while its last reaches angels and the pure spirit, and only there finds its perfection...

Until now we talked of the old astronomy (*he'yet-i kadīm*), being a means for man to know himself and to consider God's power and great wisdom. According to the wise (*hükemā*) who adhere to the second school [of the new astronomy], the sun is the most perfect of all material things and stands at the center of the world... Later on, some of the ignorant and mindless people started to attack and laugh at those scientists working to diffuse these views among the people. Because these scientists were saying that the earth is moving, which does not comply with what the ignorant people's eyes see and minds can perceive... However, in previous times as well such views were also expounded: in the last days of his life, Plato had said that the earth is moving. As the centuries passed, astronomy developed and observations helped clarify the state of the heavens; later scholars elaborated and used more their astronomical instruments and rules and, as this gave order to the state of the firmament, they considered the second view sufficient. Thus most of them adopted it and it became famous as the new astronomy. Those adhering to it even imitated the structure of the world (*he'yet-i 'ālem*) by lighting candles in their houses and churches.

It should not be forgotten that believing in and trusting the new astronomy is not one of the foundations of the religious matters nor one of the vehicles to increase one's firm belief (*yakīn*). Because no matter what is the shape and the form of the globe, no matter what is the arrangement of heaven and earth, no matter how the firmament revolves, it is impossible to deny that the universe was created and that no other than the Highest God, the creator of the most beautiful and perfect things, might have created it.

Erzurumī İbrahim Hakkı, *Mârifetnâme*, University of Michigan, Special Collections Research Center, Isl. Ms. 826, 2b–3a, 210, 199; cf. (with some misunderstandings) Erzurumlu İbrahim Hakkı, ed. Faruk Meyan, *Mârifetnâme (Tam metin)*, Istanbul: Bedir Yayınevi 2000, 13–17, 290, 270–271.

Material on vampirism and revenants; ghost stories, marvels of the Ottoman world.¹

The *fetvas* of Ebū's-su'ūd Efendi, Sheikhulislam between 1545–1574, on some incidents in the Balkans:

Question: Some people die and after they have been buried, they strip themselves of their shrouds, blood moves into their limbs, their bodies become reddish. Is there any reason for this phenomenon?

Answer: If this is true, it is caused by God's sacred will. There is a saying that "the wicked souls attach themselves to the corpses of those who, while still living, were connected to them in their morals and practice, using [these corpses] as instruments for evil actions". This is not improbable for the divine power.

Q: In case a corpse is found in the aforementioned state, what must be done with it?

A: It must be covered, no harm comes if the corpse is of a Muslim.

Q: Is it legally permissible to dig someone's body out of its grave and burn it?

A: It is not.

* * *

Q: In a village near Salonica in Rumelia, an infidel from the class of Christians died. Some days after he was buried, he presented himself in the middle of the night to the door of some of his relatives and acquaintances. He said to them: "Hey you, come and visit So-and-So with me". Next day that infidel died in his turn, and after some days he also presented himself to another one, who died as well. In short, many infidels died in this way. If some of the Muslim inhabitants of the village, seeing the undoing of so many infidels, get scared and wish to flee the village, is this legally permissible?

A: It is not. More particularly, after they have observed [the situation] in the town of the infidels, the Muslims should do nothing but refer to the authorities.

Q: In the aforementioned case, please be kind to indicate its reason and cause, along with an efficient way of dealing with it.

A: The language falls short and the mind is inadequate to express the reason and cause of such phenomena, and this is not the place to delve into what has been investigated concerning them. The way to stop them is as follows: The same day this happens, people shall go and first nail [the body] to the earth with a

1 Most of the following translations were first published in H. T. Karateke – H. Anetshofer (eds), *The Ottoman World. A Cultural History Reader, 1450–1700* (Oakland 2021), 188–194.

single stake through his navel; hopefully the phenomenon will be repelled thus. If not, and if there is still pinkish color in the corpse, they shall cut off its head and throw it near the feet. [The following] is [also] mentioned in some books: If they find the body looking the same way as they have put it in the grave, they shall cut its throat and leave him that way. If the body has altered its position [later], they shall cut off the head and put it at the end of the feet. In any case, if these measures bring no result, they shall disinter the corpse and burn it. In the times of the righteous ancestors [in the early Islamic era], [corpses] have been burnt time and again.

Ebussuud Efendi. *Şeyhülislam Ebussuud Efendi Fetvaları*. Edited by Mehmet Ertuğrul Düzdağ. Istanbul, 1983, 197–198 (nos 980–982); Istanbul, Süleymaniye Library, İsmihan Sultan 223, fol. 297b–298a.

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An anonymous chronicler, writing shortly after 1704 on an incident dated 1701 or 1702:

Report by the judge of Edirne concerning the issue of vampires (*cadu*): What is requested by this well-wisher of your Excellence is the following: The inhabitants of the Maraş village, district of Edirne, declared before the religious court that some signs of evil spirits were observed upon the grave of the previously deceased Biyıklı Ali, in the graveyard of the aforementioned village. The inhabitants were filled with fear. Indeed, in the province of Rumili, when such signs are observed in some unbeliever's grave, his body has to be nailed with a stake through his navel. If [the signs] persist, i.e. when the grave is opened the corpse is found in a different position and with its color changed to reddish, then it must be beheaded and his head put next to his feet. If the signs are still not prevented, the corpse should be disinterred and burnt. Such was the fetva of the late Ebussuud Efendi concerning such a case among unbelievers; however, we cannot find such instructions in Arabic books. This is my request.

Copy of the governor's decree: Virtuous effendi, the judge of Edirne! In order to dissipate this fancy of the villagers, let the court send an experienced and knowledgeable inspector judge to the incident site, together with an appointed marshal. Upon inquiring with the inhabitants, if they agree that signs of evil spirits are still apparent, the inspector judge should open the grave and control whether the color and position of the dead has changed. You should report accordingly.

A decree written in a similar occasion: [To the] head of the police: The inhabitants of the Hacı Sarraf quarter in Edirne declared the following before the court: “In the Muslim cemetery signs of witchcraft appeared upon the grave of a woman called Cennet, who had died three months ago. Consequently, we are all overwhelmed with groundless fear”. The court sent an inspector judge who opened the grave. Four women examined the deceased woman’s limbs and reported: “Indeed, most certainly her corpse is not rotten and her face has turned red; such phenomena are signs of witchcraft”. You are to open the aforementioned grave and do whatever is accustomed in order to remove the horror and illusions of the inhabitants.

Markus Köhbach, “Ein Fall von Vampirismus bei den Osmanen,” *Balkan Studies* 20 (1979), 83–90; Abdülkadir Özcan (ed.), *Anonim Osmanlı Tarihi (1099–1116 / 1688–1704)*, Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu 2000, 148–149.

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Mustafa b. Mehmed Cinānī’s (d. 1595) stories on marvels, ghosts and jinn:

In front of the tekke of Sinanpaşa, near Başçeşme in Gallipoli, there is a poplar tree that, after falling to the ground and remaining there for some time, was found standing in its place one night; that is what they say ...

In the kaza of Lofça, in Rumelia, there is a water spring in the middle of a rock, no larger than the mouth of an oven. It is said that every year, at the beginning of the days of the month of Rebi‘ al-evvel, the water stops flowing for ninety days; during these days, one can hear the sounds of drums, flutes, and other musical instruments, as if a group of men were playing music. Whoever comes and listens, hears them for sure. But after ninety days, the water starts flowing again and one can listen to it ...

Mevlana Bistan-i Tirevī narrates that a few years ago, sweet and white water appeared near Tire. Water so sweet that it cannot be described. By chance, one day someone washed their handkerchief in it: it turned black. After that, everyone came to know about it and started blackening their clothes with this water. It is said to be such a beautiful dye that it has no equal ...

Some friends tell this story, that in Egypt there is a wolf called the sorcerer wolf (*zī‘b-i sāhīr*). When it encounters a man, it stands upright in front of him to the right and left, in a well-known manner. The man gets up and immediately, by God’s

order, falls under the spell of this wolf; he loses his will and follows it to its lair. He becomes lost and bewildered. Then the wolf kills and eats him.

* * *

A very strange event: Someone by the name of Ahmed Çavuş narrates the following: “In the castle of Dıraç (Durrës) in the province of Albania, if someone—be him infidel or Muslim—falls seriously ill and loses his mind, then, without his knowing and by God’s order, the soul of someone who died previously enters his body and starts telling its own troubles [ahvalini]. For instance, [the soul] says in the voice of the moribund: “Hey tyrants, why don’t you inspect my case? I am So-and-so, son of So-and-so; they torment me greatly in the Hereafter. I had committed this or that sin; my torment is off-limits, and you, you stay in my house and you wear my clothes and you spend my money: why don’t you have any prayers read for my soul. Why don’t you make any charity for my sake?” Those who know [him] understand.

Once an ill person became unconscious right next to me, and one of the dead entered the body and said: “I am the wife of So-and-So Çavuş; when I was alive I committed adultery with someone. Now they torture me a lot because of this. I am totally ruined. [My heirs] wasted away so much of my property and money, why don’t they [even] think of me?” Thus she was crying. After some time, the ill came back to his senses: we asked, he had no idea of what had happened.

Sometimes the soul of the dead comes on the roof of his house and cries: “You are sitting here in ease and possess my house and properties. You do not think of my situation, you do not once repent and give charity for me!” Now if [the ghost] is a Muslim, they bring a learned man, who reads some verses from the Koran and drives it away. If it is a Christian, they bring a priest who reads from the Holy Gospel. Or else, [the ghost] does not cease until the morning”. Thus he related.

Let this not be conceived as farfetched or marvelous, for it has often happened that the soul of a body or a spirit enters [a corporeal form] and speaks, with God’s permission. There are many trustworthy narrations about this phenomenon.

* * *

And in the same vein: Someone named Mevlana Halil, a former assistant of the late [Grand Mufti] Çivizade Efendi and now a dervish, related to this humble one the following:

“I was once staying at somebody’s house in Cairo. One day, when I was sitting in the room, a man came telling me that my host was asking for me. I stood up and went inside. My host had a concubine who was epileptic. In order to save her, they had brought an expert exorcist. The exorcist was sitting, and the concubine was lying down. The host said to me: “This girl lying here is our concubine. Her epilepsy grasps her continuously, so looking for a cure we brought this exorcist. He just recited something, he made the concubine unconscious and he summoned the jinn that possesses her and put it into her body.

Once or twice he asked the jinn, ‘why are you torturing her?’. 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, *ayyuba l-jinn, li-ayy shay tasra hadha [!] l-jariyatahu ta’khudhuba*, 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”.

Again, as instructed by the exorcist I asked: “O jinn, are you going to abandon this concubine from now on?” It answered again *na-tavanam kard* [I cannot do it]. Then the exorcist stood up, asked for a pen and wrote [something] on a paper; he rolled up this paper, burnt its edge and had the smoke enter the concubine’s nose and ears. She appeared to suffer and cried out very loudly; she could not stand still; [the jinn] did not stop crying: *masuz masuz*, that is “don’t burn me, don’t burn me! I left her alone and won’t possess her again”. The exorcist made him swear a very strong oath on the Prophet Salomon’s seal. The jinn took the oath to the effect that it would never again possess the concubine, and then went away. At that moment, the concubine’s mind came back to her head and she stood in her feet again. Her master asked her what had happened, but she took awesome and severe oaths saying: “I have not the slightest idea”. All this happened in my very presence and before my own eyes”. Thus he related.

There are many stories of this kind, and there is no need to tell them since they are

so famous. Many have related, and it cannot be denied, that wicked spirits cling to dead bodies, so that these become enchanted and make strange movements. It is even lawful to nail to the ground by the navel bodies enchanted like this, or to cut their heads, or –if those measures bring no result– to burn them. There are illustrious fetvas on this issue by the Grand Mufti Ebussuud Efendi.

* * *

And in this vein, one of the strangest stories that I have heard is the following. A very strange event: Mevlana Seyyid Muhyiddin from among the equitable judges, who served at the time in the district of Morea (Peloponnese), narrated the following:

“It so happened that someone in the district of Morea died. As is the custom there, he had a maid-servant, who survived him. Three or four months after he was deceased, one day the aforementioned maid came crying and said: “My master came, he went to bed and had intercourse with me, just like he used to do when he was alive”. People who heard this laughed and did not believe her. The poor maid continued to protest: “My master comes to me every night, he destroys my flower and has intercourse with me; you don’t believe me!”. At last, she left that house and went to another; she was sleeping always with some other people beside her. Still, whenever she was alone, the master came again and had sex with her; there was no solution to be found. Finally, there was a man of knowledge by the name of Piri Dede, who was a madrasa graduate. The girl went to him and narrated the story.

The narrator says: The aforementioned Piri Dede narrated [the following] to me in a discussion face to face: “When the woman first came to me I did not believe her, but she swore strong oaths; so I decided to go there and stand guard. I told her: “Let me come together with the owner of the house you are staying in, and watch over you. When this dead man seeks to take you again, call us and we will come and help you, and we will see him with our own eyes”. The woman said “Well, okay” and left. She [also] called the owner of the house, and I went there.

We both kept watch outside, in a sofa, and sent the woman inside. It was afternoon and there was still daylight; the woman started to cry: “Help, my master came again!” We rose and ran inside. By the truth of God, who created the world with His power, I saw the man as I knew him in life—he was between the woman’s legs and had intercourse with her, like he did while he was alive. As soon as we saw him, we charged upon him; we thought of hitting him with a sword or a dagger, but could not find any. We searched behind the door and found an iron skewer, but when we took it and came back he had disappeared; we could see nobody any more. But what

had happened to the woman was manifest. Less than ten days later she died as well, and she was buried next to her master. Truly this is a story I saw with my own eyes, God be my witness. God only knows what the truth is.” Thus he related this story.

* * *

A strange event: Someone called Mevlana Recayi, who lives near Sanduklı and is one of the assistants of the late Monla Efendi, narrated to this humble one the following:

“With God’s permission, in the tribe of the Yörüks who graze in the plateau of Gölçük near Sanduklı a jinn has settled in the body of a ten-years-old girl, and more particularly in her right thigh; it speaks in a strange voice, which resembles to the sound of a whistle, but the girl does not open her mouth. This girl has a brother; whenever someone comes to inquire for a matter, this boy calls the jinn saying “Hey beauty, have you come?” and speaks with it [as an intermediary].

The narrator says: At this time Monla Efendi had ordained me to construct some watermills on the river Gediz. I went to ask how many watermills can be built upon Gediz. The girl’s brother came and as soon as he asked “beauty, have you come here?” a voice was heard, saying: “First we need a cake in front of us”. What could I do, I produced a cake. Then the voice came again: “Five, the river Gediz five”. Upon this the boy said: “What are you saying, I didn’t understand a thing”. The jinn answered: “The inquirer understood my words, it is not necessary that I explain to you”. Indeed, I had understood these words: the meaning was that five watermills could be built on the river Gediz.

People of this area come and make a lot of inquiries and take answers according to their wishes. The girl does not open her mouth at all; she turns into a half-witted of sorts and stays silent and mute.” Thus he related. And God knows the truth of the matter.

Osman Ünlü (ed.), *Cinânî: Bedâyiü'l-âsâr*, Harvard: Harvard University 2009 [Sources of Oriental Languages and Literatures 92–93], II:329–337.

Translations by Marinos Sariyannis.

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Ottoman occult practitioners in prison

The following Ottoman Turkish accounts reveal different destinies of two imprisoned occult practitioners: a successful escape in late fifteenth-century Istanbul and a firm punishment in mid sixteenth-century Kastamonu (Northern Anatolia). While the first celebrates the deeds of a sea captain who uses the science of properties (*havâs*) to escape from prisons, as narrated by a late-fifteenth century chronicler, the latter punishes a geomancer who allegedly tricked many by claiming to find treasure for them, as recorded in a sixteenth-century imperial register.

[Among the events of Year 901 (1495/1496)]

There was a captain (*re'îs*) named Kara Ali. He was among the famous captains. He caused tumult over the seas and the Frankish lands. He took infidel and Muslim ships. He devoured them like a dragon. When Euboea (in the Aegean) was taken, he was a captain and took part in that ghaza and conquest. Twice, he was a prisoner at the Fortress of Rhodes. He escaped. He saved himself in some way. He was a prisoner in Egypt and Belgrade too. Again, he escaped with a trick (*lu'b*). He was also a prisoner at our province twice and escaped. When he was a prisoner for the third time at the dungeon of Kostantin [ie. Istanbul], he again saved himself. He knew the science of properties (*havâs*). They said that he practiced the science of properties. They said that he saved himself with the power of science of properties. It is not a wonder that he was able to escape in this way. God (May His Glory be exalted and blessed) found a way. At the end, the appointed time of death arrived, and he perished in the hand of Sultan Korkud Çelebi.

Necdet Öztürk (ed.), *Oruç Beğ Tarihi (Giriş, Metin, Kronoloji, Dizin, Tıpkıbasım)*, Istanbul 2007, 170–71.

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So written.

Handed over to Âhmedi Mustafa.

On 9 Şevvâl, year 967 (3 July 1560)

Order to the commander of Kastamonu and the judge of Kastamonu: You are the commander. You sent a letter notifying that “Geomancer Mehmed, from among the Maghrebis, took goods and sustenance of Muslims saying ‘I shall teach the science of alchemy (*ilm-i kimyâ*) and you shall find treasures.’ He committed shameless acts with many people’s wives. Numerous Muslims came forth [with grievances against him]. Some demanded a hundred and some demanded two hundred gold coins [which he had taken from them]. Debts had to be paid off to creditors after deaths, some of them did not have the means. As he was a man who committed illicit acts (*harâm-zâde*), he was prisoned at the fortress of Kastamonu. Along with some criminals, he managed to unfasten his bonds, go down the castle walls, and escape. Men were sent and he was caught again. He was securely imprisoned firmly at the Fortress of Kangırı.” Now, I order for the above-mentioned to be securely imprisoned at a fortified castle and never to be set free. I order that you imprison the above-mentioned securely at a fortified castle. By no means you shall let him free.

3 Numaralı Mühimme Defteri, 966–968/1558–1560, Özet ve Transkripsiyon, Ankara 1993, Document number 1301, 577.

Translations by Aslı Niyazioğlu.