

FANTASIES OF THE END: COSMOLOGY AND APOCALYPSE IN *DÜRR-İ MEKNUN*

by

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FANTASIES OF THE END: COSMOLOGY AND APOCALYPSE IN *DÜRR-I*  
*MEKNUN*

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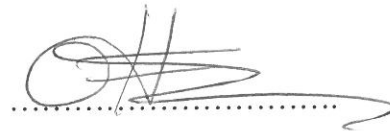


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## ABSTRACT

### FANTASIES OF THE END: COSMOLOGY AND APOCALYPSE IN *DÜRR-İ MEKNUN*

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This thesis aims to present an alternative reading of *Dürr-i Meknun* (“The Hidden Pearl”). It was penned by Yazıcıoğlu Ahmed Bican, an Ottoman mystic, in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. He was the son of Salah al-Din “al-katib” and the younger brother of the famous Yazıcıoğlu Mehmed whose works bear similar thematic affinities. During his lifetime Ahmed called himself - and he was called- “Bican”, (The Lifeless), due to his flagging appearance as a result of his praxis of austerities. The Yazıcıoğlu brothers were the students of Hacı Bayram of Ankara, and they belonged to the Bayrami order of dervishes.

In broadest terms, *Dürr-i Meknun* can be classified as a work of cosmology imbued with apocalyptic traditions. However, as the genres of the premodern era do not have concise boundaries, labeling the text under a modern, compact term automatically beclouds to understand it in unity. Thus, this thesis adopts a comparative textual method in order to elucidate the different dimensions of the text and its intertextuality.

Set in a hierarchical order, the cosmology depicted in *Dürr-i Meknun* concludes with apocalyptic speculations. Deconstructing the recent studies on Ahmed Bican’s work which analyzes the relationship between the conquest of Constantinople and the prophetic themes under a political topos, this study does assay the text on an intellectual plane reflecting somewhat blurred peripheries between Byzantine and Muslim apocalyptic traditions and among Sunnah and Shiah in the period preceding the Ottoman-Safavid conflict of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries.

## ÖZET

SONUN DÜŞLERİ: *DÜRR-İ MEKNUN*'DA KOZMOLOJİ VE APOKALİPS

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Anahtar Kelimeler: Ahmed Bican, Kozmoloji, Apokalips, İstanbul, 'aja'ib ve ghara'ib

Bu tez, *Dürr-i Meknun*'un ("Saklı İnci") alternatif bir okumasını sunmayı amaçlamaktadır. Eser, 15.yüzyılda bir Osmanlı sufisi olan Yazıcıoğlu Ahmed Bican tarafından kaleme alınmıştır. Ahmed Bican; Kâtip Salâhaddin'in oğlu, meşhur Yazıcıoğlu Mehmed'in de erkek kardeşidir. Bu üç ismin eserleri aynı zamanda tematik benzerlikler taşır. Ahmed, sofu bir hayat tarzı benimsediğinden, oldukça solgun ve zayıf bir görünümdeydir. Bu sebeple kendisinin de kullandığı, "Bican" (Cansız) lakabıyla anılmaktadır. Yazıcıoğlu kardeşler, Ankaralı Hacı Bayram'ın öğrencileri olup, Bayrami tarikatına bağlıdırlar.

En geniş manasıyla, *Dürr-i Meknun*, apokaliptik geleneklerle dolu bir kozmoloji eseri olarak sınıflandırılabilir. Ancak, modernite öncesi dönemin janrları keskin hatlara sahip olmadıklarından, metni, modern, kompakt bir terimle nitelendirmek, metnin bütünsel açıdan kavranışını engellemektedir. Bu sebeple tezde, söz konusu metnin değişik boyutlarını ve metinlerarasılığını göstermek amacıyla karşılaştırmalı metinsel bir metod kullanılmaktadır.

*Dürr-i Meknun*'da tasvir edilen, hiyerarşik bir düzene oturtulmuş kozmoloji, apokaliptik kurgularla son bulur. Bu tez, Ahmed Bican'ın metnini, İstanbul'un fethi ve kehanet temaları üzerinden, bir politik motif altında analiz eden son dönem çalışmalarını yapışökümleyerek, entellektüel düzlemde irdellemektedir. Böylece, 16. ve 17. yüzyıllardaki Osmanlı – Safevi çatışmasından önceki dönemde Sünni ve Şii, Bizans ve Müslüman apokaliptik geleneklerdeki bulanık sınırları yansıtmaktadır.

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## INTRODUCTION

This study focuses on the cosmology and the concept of apocalypse in *Dürr-i Meknun* (“The Hidden Pearl”) penned by the 15<sup>th</sup> century Ottoman mystic Ahmed Bican Yazıcıoğlu. Despite his well-known oeuvre, we have limited information about Ahmed Bican's life as it has also received little attraction by modern scholars. Nevertheless, his religious and encyclopaedic works have never lost its importance even for the modern readers. His most famous work titled *Envârü'l- Âşıkîn* (“The Lights of the Lovers of God) has a significant place in the socio-religious life as it has continuously been copied and reprinted since the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Also, it is one of the first Turkish works that have been translated into Western languages as its translation into Hungarian was made by Házi János in 1624 and two years later it was printed in Košice.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, not only modern works but also Ottoman biographical dictionaries have reflected Yazıcıoğlu brothers Ahmed Bican and Mehmed as the embodiment of religious devotion, pure spirituality and scholarly achievements. Actually, this image overlaps with Ahmed Bican's own presentation of himself in his works as a pious man who rejects mundane pleasures through devoting his time to pray and contemplation.

Indeed, the earliest information about Ahmed Bican's life are the clues in his work, *Envârü'l- Âşıkîn*. Born in Anatolia towards the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, he was the son of Salah al-Din “al-katib” (scribe) and younger brother of the famous Yazıcıoğlu Mehmed.<sup>2</sup> In the preface and the epilogue of *Envârü'l- Âşıkîn*, he extols his elder brother Mehmed with whom he shares an interest in religious subjects and reciprocally cooperates while composing and translating books. He also mentions that the brothers are the students of Hacı Bayram of Ankara, and they belong to the Bayrami order of dervishes.<sup>3</sup> He indicates that he lives in a dervish lodge in Gallipoli with his brother. Also, the writings of his brother Mehmed, Lâmi, Taşkoprülüzade, Mustafa Ali and Evliya Çelebi provide information on his bibliography and works albeit they can

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<sup>1</sup> Ayşe Beyazıt, “Ahmed Bican'ın ‘Müntehâ’ İsimli Fusuh Tercümesi Işığında Tasavvuf Düşüncesi”, MA Thesis, İstanbul: Marmara University, 2008. p. 43.

<sup>2</sup> See, V. L. Ménage, “Bidjan, Ahmed” *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, p. 1262; Amil Çelebioğlu, “Ahmed Bican”, *DIA*, p. 49.

<sup>3</sup> Ahmed Bican Yazıcıoğlu, *Envârü'l- Âşıkîn*, İstanbul: Bedir Yayınevi. p. 20-23, 536.



sometimes be misleading.<sup>4</sup> Nonetheless, it is known that Ahmed Bican spent most of his time in Anatolia, leaving the area only twice: one for to attend a school in Egypt, the second one is for a pilgrimage to Mecca. During his lifetime he called himself - and he was called- “Bican”, (The Lifeless), due to his emaciated appearance stemming from his praxis of austerities.

Ahmed Bican wrote his books in the Turkish language in order to make it understandable for his society. This aspect can be associated with his social responsibility that aims to instruct his people in a life style dedicated to Islam. He also translated prominent Arabic works into Turkish, such as the 13<sup>th</sup> century author Zakariyya b. Muhammad al-Qazwini’s *‘Aja’ib al-Makhlūqat wa-Ghara’ib al-Mawjudat* (“The Wonders of Creation and the Oddities of Existence”) which obviously had a great impact on him. However, this is not a verbatim translation as scholars like Taeschner, Babinger and Ménage state that the work is merely an extract of the original text.<sup>5</sup> Also, Ahmed Bican’s voluminous *Envârü’l- Âşîkîn* is a translation of his brother Mehmed’s *Mağârib al-zamân li-gurûbi’l-aşyâ’fi’l-‘ayn wa-l-‘ayân*. Thus, Ahmed Bican’s most well-known and widespread work is actually a translation under the title of *Envârü’l- Âşîkîn*.<sup>6</sup> It can be also considered as a re-writing of *Mağârib al-zamân* since Ahmed wrote a new book through drawing on the materials taken in by his brother Mehmed in his own work. Completed in February 1451, *Envârü’l- Âşîkîn* is organized into five parts dealing with the ranks of creatures, the prophets, the angels, the day of resurrection and the heaven.

Ahmed Bican also transformed his father Salih’s long *mesnevi* poem *Şemsiyye* (Song of the Sun) into prose. Seemingly, Ahmed and his father shared common interests as this poem is also about the animal kingdom, the plants and the constellation of the heavenly bodies.<sup>7</sup> Another work by Ahmed Bican is shortly known as *Müntehâ* which is in fact the Turkish translation of Yazıcıoğlu Mehmed’s Arabic commentary on Ibn

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<sup>4</sup> For example, Evliya Çelebi claims that Ahmed Bican’s tomb is in Sofia, see Semavi Eyice, “Ahmed Bican Türbesi”, *DIA*, p. 52.

<sup>5</sup> Laban Kaptein, *Apocalypse and the Antichrist Dajjal in Islam: Ahmed Bijan’s Eschatology Revisited*, *Asch* (privately published), 2011. p. 31.

<sup>6</sup> Amil Çelebioğlu, “Ahmed Bican”, *DIA*, p. 50.

<sup>7</sup> Kaptein, *Apocalypse and the Antichrist Dajjal in Islam*, p. 12.

Arabi's *Fusus al-Hikam*. Hence, a detailed analysis on *Müntehâ* is crucial as the text is intermingled as a combination of three different works and the problems related to paraphrasing and plagiarism are prevalent in the studies of pre-modern world. Furthermore, another work attributed to Ahmed Bican, *Ravhu'l-ervâh*, was surmised to be an extract from a chapter on the prophets from either *Envârü'l- Âşîkîn* or *Müntehâ*.<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, a later study by Aynur Koçak upon examining the manuscript in Austrian National Library (*Österreichische Nationalbibliothek*, N. F. 202), has illustrated that the text is not a history of the prophets, yet a work of sufistic themes.<sup>9</sup> Ahmed has also a short poem titled *Cevâhirname* in which the salutary effects of some precious or semi-precious stones are mentioned. Laban Kaptein asserts that the work is a translation and/or imitation of *kutub al-ahğâr* genre of Arabic literature.<sup>10</sup>

Ahmed Bican's cosmographical work *Dürr-i Meknun* which bears close affinities to Qazwini's work, *'Aja'ib al-Makhlûqat*, is in fact, both undated and anonymous. *Dürr-i Meknun* has been called the first Ottoman encyclopaedia, yet also it may well have inaugurated a new tradition of Ottoman story-telling, mostly owing to Ahmed Bican's being a connoisseur of Arabic, and also, Byzantine tales.<sup>11</sup> Despite all, very few academic studies, much less a monograph, have been devoted to his bibliography or his work.

Three scholars, namely Laban Kaptein, Necdet Sakaoğlu and Stéphane Yerasimos, produced fundamental works concentrating on *Dürr-i Meknun*. Sakaoğlu and Yerasimos declare that Ahmed Bican is the author, on the basis of the work's being traditionally attributed to him. However, a close reading between *Dürr-i Meknun* and Ahmed's other works unravels the thematic confluence and narrative style that hinge on cosmology, creation, wonders, eschatology, salvation, piety and Sufism. Another problem, the date of its composition has brought about a set of discussions on whether it was written before or after 1453. Considering the physical depiction of Constantinople

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<sup>8</sup> Amil Çelebioğlu, "Ahmed Bican", *DIA*, p. 51.

<sup>9</sup> Ayşe Beyazıt, "Ahmed Bican'ın 'Müntehâ' İsimli Fusuh Tercümesi Işığında Tasavvuf Düşüncesi", p. 47.

<sup>10</sup> Kaptein, *Apocalypse and the Antichrist Dajjal in Islam*, p. 31. See also Fatma S. Kutlar's work on *Cevâhirname*: "Ahmed-i Bîcân'ın manzum cevâhir-nâme'si" in *Arayışlar, İnsan Bilimleri Araştırmaları* 7/8 (2002) pp. 59-68.

<sup>11</sup> Kaptein, *Apocalypse and the Antichrist Dajjal in Islam*, p. xv.

in the text, Yerasimos avers that *Dürr-i Meknun* must have been composed after 1453 and before 1465 when Ahmed composed his last known work.<sup>12</sup> Likewise, Laban Kaptein, discussing the philological and linguistic characteristics of the work, more or less agrees with Yerasimos on the date. According to him, the work was certainly written between 1400 and 1466.<sup>13</sup> Actually, Ahmed Bican's reference to 'Abd al-Rahman Bistami, (d.1454) the divinatory master, as having passed away indicates a post-1453 date of composition.<sup>14</sup>

Discussions on the date, before or after 1453, the year of the conquest of Constantinople by Mehmed II, are important to consolidate or weaken the inclination that regards *Dürr-i Meknun* as an apocalyptic work. Bearing in mind that the fall of Constantinople has a significant place in Islamic eschatology, Yerasimos understands the last chapters of the book which include eschatological topoi and motifs as the author's response to his own time, especially the conquest of Constantinople, and identifies him as an apocalypticist. Furthermore, he claims that this apocalyptic discourse in the text illustrates Ahmed Bican's reaction against Mehmed II's centralist project on grounds that such a new political ideology was not welcomed by the dervish groups who would lose their political and economic power due to the centralization of the empire. To wit, for Yerasimos, being a mystic, Ahmed Bican was totally against this novel regulation, and expressed his discomfort with it through depicting Constantinople as an "evil" city full of talismans and indicating that the capture of it by a Muslim sultan would definitely bring about the End. In fact, Yerasimos's argument on *Dürr-i Meknun* has been oft-quoted in Ottoman history studies whenever a research related to the conquest of Constantinople, or the Ottoman historiography of the pre-modern period is made. Such a shallow repetition of Yerasimos's argument has triggered me to pose new questions to *Dürr-i Meknun* beginning with: Is a different way of looking at the text possible?

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<sup>12</sup> Stéphane Yerasimos, *Kostantiniye ve Ayasofya Efsaneleri*, (Çev. Şirin Tekeli), İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 1993. p. 112.

<sup>13</sup> Kaptein, *Apocalypse and the Antichrist Dajjal in Islam*, p. 39.

<sup>14</sup> Yazıcıoğlu Ahmed Bican, *Dürr-i Meknun*, (Çevrimyazı ve Notlar: Necdet Sakaoğlu), İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 1999. p. 33. See also, Ahmet Demirtaş'ş edition of *Dürr-i Meknun* which is presented in alphabetic transcription and includes facsimile: *Dürr-i Meknun*, İstanbul: Akademik Kitaplar, 2009.

Admittedly, the world in which Ahmed Bican lived was still crumbling after the rivalry between Yıldırım Beyazid and Timur Lenk which led to devastating battles and civil war. Moreover, Gelibolu, a silent provincial town of today's Turkey, was back then the arena on which struggle between the Ottomans and Byzantium took place. Besides, the conquest of Constantinople as the prelude of empire building has been also stressed by modern scholars who attempt to allot a place to *Dürr-i Meknun* in the apocalyptic tradition. It is explicit that the conquest initiated a process of urban, political and economic re-formation. For example, according to Karen Barkey, the conquest of Constantinople functioned as a key event in the construction of Ottoman Empire: "The empire that was built after 1453 became a robust, flexible, and adaptive political entity where a patrimonial center, a strong army, and a dependent and assimilated state elite interconnected with many diverse and multilingual populations ensconced in their ecological and territorial niches."<sup>15</sup> Necipoğlu also talks about the building of new palaces in the newly conquered city and states that this building program "was primarily motivated by the new imperial image of the sultan that crystallized while Constantinople was being transformed into the Ottoman capital."<sup>16</sup> Thus, seemingly there is a plethora of secondary literature on the importance of the capture of Constantinople for the Ottomans, yet, is that enough to contextualize the theme in *Dürr-i Meknun*?

This study takes its departure from an essential question: to which genre *Dürr-i Meknun* pertains? Even though the nomenclature regarding the works composed in the pre-modern era is a difficult task due to the elusiveness of the boundaries, the necessity to categorize the work is helpful to understand it holistically. A brief look at its table of contents reflects that the schematic theme designed by the author is parallel to the cosmologies of the pre-modern period. Replete with stories of wonders-of-creation, *Dürr-i Meknun* includes eschatological materials in its very end, in fact, the End of Time is rarely posited in the rest of it. On the other hand, the text is silent on historical events occurring during the same period which makes it almost impossible to understand whether Ahmed Bican was totally impressed or anxious with the conquest of Constantinople.

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<sup>15</sup> Karen Barkey, *Empire of difference: the Ottomans in comparative perspective*, Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008. p. 67.

<sup>16</sup> Gülru Necipoğlu, *Architecture, Ceremonial, And Power*, Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1991. p.10.

Sakaoğlu in his introduction to *Dürr-i Mecnun* defines the work as an example of “cosmological encyclopedia”.<sup>17</sup> Initially, the term “encyclopedia” is coined in Latin and:

“[...] shortly thereafter in various European vernaculars by humanist writers ca. 1470-1530, on the model of what they thought was a Greek term, *enkuklopaideia*, for ‘circle of learning’. The term and its supposed etymology have been rich in history, inspiring authors over many centuries to expatiate on the metaphor of the ‘circle of learning’ in any number of organizational schemes. [...] Philological work of the last half century has established, however, that the etymology from *enkuklopaideia* is false, based on a corruption of the Greek expression *enkuklios paideia*, which designated common education or general culture.”<sup>18</sup>

Indeed, before the 18<sup>th</sup> century, there was no genre that can be named as “encyclopedia”. Nonetheless, since that time, historians have not hesitated to use this category so as to delineate works which included neither the title nor the format of modern encyclopedia.<sup>19</sup> Thereby, just having basic encyclopedic features such as a classification or a synthesis of knowledge would be enough for a work to be described as an encyclopedia. As such a formulized line is much more related to European history, scholars of Islamic history have showed a tendency to evaluate the Islamic texts through the criteria specially set for European works. An example of this can be observed through Syrinx von Hees’s study on Qazwini’s *‘Aja’ib al-Makhlūqat* which revolves around the question of whether the book is an “encyclopedia of natural science” or merely a cosmography?<sup>20</sup> Following the criteria developed by the medievalists for the genre “encyclopedia” such as “an organised compendium of knowledge”, “manageable brevity”, “didactic”, “specialized knowledge verified by authorities”, “user-friendly”, usage of “examples, narrations and illustrations”, “credibility”, “to aid the general cultural memory”, and “the central position of natural history”, Von Hees deduces that *‘Aja’ib al-Makhlūqat* is an encyclopedia of natural history. A criticism at that point can be addressed through the different dynamics in writing praxis, albeit strong similarities,

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<sup>17</sup> Necdet Sakaoğlu, “‘Dürr-i Mecnun’ ve Yazarı” in *Dürr-i Mecnun*, pp. 1-18.

<sup>18</sup> Ann Blair, “A European’s Perspective” in *Organizing Knowledge : Encyclopedic Activities in the Pre-Eighteenth Century Islamic World*, ed. by Gerhard Endress, Boston MA: Brill Academic Publishers, 2006. pp. 201-215. p. 201.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 203.

<sup>20</sup> Syrinx von Hees, “Al-Qazwini’s *‘Aja’ib al-Makhlūqat*: An Encyclopædia of Natural History?” in *Organizing Knowledge*, pp. 171-186.

in Western and Islamic texts of the medieval period, therefore it is not totally reliable to analyze an Islamic work only with the lenses of Western conceptualization of encyclopedia. Moreover, considering the relation between *'Aja'ib al-Makhlūqat* and *Dürr-i Meknün* one can pose whether Ahmed Bican's text is also an encyclopedia of natural history. A brief look at its titles of the chapters illuminates that *Dürr-i Meknün* presents knowledge in accordance with its systematics portraying God's creations in a hierarchical arrangement. Nevertheless, the chapter titles do not give a general view that can be useful to determine the genre of the work. For instance, while there are chapters on the properties of plants, fruits and stones which were penned like encyclopedic entries on natural history, some chapters are imbued with literary narrations such as Süleyman's throne and reign and the story of the bird Simurg. Besides, the last chapters were allotted to the ciphers of *djafr* (science of letters) and the signs of the Last Hour. Thus, rather than naming a genre, *Dürr-i Meknün* can be evaluated as an eclectic work in which various genres are permeable.

Only naming the genre does not help figure out the text entirely. To begin with, while describing the cosmos (*'alam*) and both visible and invisible beings in terrestrial and celestial spheres, Islamic cosmology is based on the Qur'an, *hadith*, and cosmological and geographical works that pertain to pious speculation. In an attempt to understand the cosmos, these works have a wide range of various topics such as angels, stars, planets, islands, cities, mountains, seas, animals, plants and minerals. Some of these works also allude to eschatology like *Dürr-i Meknün*. Obviously, the subjects dealt in the works of Islamic cosmology overlap with different fields of modern knowledge like history, geography, cartography, biology, zoology, anthropology and theology. Despite this, modern scholarship on Ottoman History has mostly disparaged and ignored this tradition on the grounds that it reflects the inchoate stage of Ottoman geographical/cosmological knowledge, replete with "unrealistic" and "fantastic" elements. Therefore, the paucity of systematic research on pre-modern Ottoman cosmographies which were mainly nourished by history, travel literature and folklore sets a group of problems regarding the secondary literature. However, these works are illuminative to discern the worldview of pre-modern Ottomans. As Michel Foucault highlights in *The Order of Things*, medieval works on nature are a spectrum of various details including not only physical characteristics, but also legends and stories related to

the subject.<sup>21</sup> Just as the documentation was not common in the pre-modern era, these works can be seen as the accumulations of different and unrelated knowledge. This is one of the obstacles that I have come across during my research on *Dürr-i Meknun*.

The starting point of the argument in this study is the re-examination of Yerasimos's analysis on *Dürr-i Meknun*. As Yerasimos's thoughts revolve around the conquest of Constantinople and its impact on the text, my thesis will be confined to this aspect. Nonetheless, this does not necessarily mean neglecting the overall structure of the text. Thus, my preliminary attempt is to reconcile the textual analysis of *Dürr-i Meknun* with the broader plane of literature on the conquest of Constantinople.

Chapter I is dedicated to an interpretative framework so as to discuss *Dürr-i Meknun* in the political and historical panorama of the mid-15<sup>th</sup> century. The stress will be upon the Ottoman chronicles of that period which narrate the changing dynamics in the Ottoman lands with the conquest. Apart from the Ottoman historians like Aşıkpaşazade and Tursun Bey, for a comparative method, I will also use Nestor-Iskander's eye-witness account. Also, since the birth of Ottoman historiography coincides with the Ahmed Bican's period, I will present a brief comment on it.

The aim of chapter II is twofold. Firstly, it provides a comparative view of wonders-of-creation theme both in Islamic and Christian canon. This will also present a concise view of Ahmed Bican's cosmology as it is imbued with wonders and marvels in general. Secondly, within this context, it engenders a question referring to Yerasimos's argument: Does the reference to Constantinople as a city of talismans in *Dürr-i Meknun* consequently mean that Ahmed Bican was against its conquest? After discussing the “*'aja'ib*” and “*ghara'ib*” tradition which is essential to answer the question above, I will lean over the histories and travelogues portraying Constantinople as a city of marvels. Unearthing the similarities and/or differences between these texts of the medieval and pre-modern era, I will attempt to understand if these “marvelous” depictions of a city have an intertextual context.

Chapter III will be reserved for an elaborate discussion on whether Ahmed Bican and his *Dürr-i Meknun* can be called apocalyptic. Beginning with theoretical

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<sup>21</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things*, London: Routledge Classics, 2002. p. 136-144.

background on the conceptualization of apocalypse, I will deconstruct Yerasimos's central argument through a close reading of the text and its sources.

Of course, the problems related to *Dürr-i Meknun* are not only the abovementioned ones as it is a compact text despite its small volume. However, to cover all the subjects through problematizing them is almost an unattainable goal within the boundaries of this research. Yet, still, as the most of the references to *Dürr-i Meknun* in secondary literature have come up with Yerasimos's studies, I think that beginning with a reconsideration of his arguments will require further research with novel problems.



## CHAPTER I

### A GLANCE AT THE ESSENTIAL FRAMEWORK

#### 1.1. The Birth of Ottoman Historiography

Especially with the impact of Yerasimos's studies, it has been generally asserted that even though Ottomans and Byzantines lived side-by-side before the conquest of Constantinople, Ottoman knowledge about Byzantium was very limited, and rather than learning the history of Byzantines, Ottomans created a history for them.<sup>22</sup> Leaving aside the postmodern theoretical arguments on the created histories, I will touch upon Yerasimos's further discussion which claims that, after the conquest a corpus of legends on the foundation of Constantinople emerged yet they were posited in order to object to Mehmed II's centralist and the imperial project. This canon was also used by later Ottoman historians like Ibn Kemal and Mustafa Âli as the only information available on the history of Byzantium. Nonetheless, it should be noted that there is a lacuna in this argument as it does not take into the consideration the peculiar characteristics of Ottoman historiography.

Admittedly, Yerasimos' interpretation based on the assumption that all of the texts that include elements of myths and legends pertain to the same political topos, to wit, reaction against the imperial project, is a reductivist approach. Rather than generalizing different texts within the same context, decoding each text within its own parameters is essential. Likewise, the fundamental and unique characteristics of the origins of the Ottoman historiography should be also contextualized. As the genres of

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<sup>22</sup> Stéphane Yerasimos, *Kostantiniye ve Ayasofya Efsaneleri*, p. 7-9. For a recent work with this line of thought see, Cumhur Bekar, "A New Perception of Rome, Byzantium and Constantinople in Hezarfen Hüseyin's Universal History", İstanbul: Boğaziçi University, Unpublished MA Thesis, 2011.

the early modern era generally melt in the same pot, both the oral and written works should be emphasized in the formation of Ottoman historiography. Thus, in this part I will firstly scrutinize the circulation of popular epics on the deeds of important dervish and warrior figures and their reflections in the very first examples of Ottoman historiography. Also, I will mention the specific characteristics of early Ottoman historiography and its different dimensions in a nutshell.

The birth of Ottoman historiography can be linked to the gruesome experiences which gave a shock to the Ottoman lands in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. It was also the time when Ahmed Bican lived, and he witnessed a series of difficulties for the Ottoman enterprise. Beginning with the Battle of Ankara in 1402, Ottoman polity almost disintegrated. The interregnum, during which Ottoman princes fought against one another to gain control over an individed realm, lasted from 1402 to mid-1413. Mehmed I (r. 1413-1421) tried to carry out a careful policy so as to rebuild the authority of the sultan while accommodating various local powers. However, Murad II (r. 1421-1444, 1446-1451) again had to handle with two rebellions by the family. It was finally with Mehmed II (r. 1444-1446, 1451-1481) the struggle between the princes came to a halt owing to legitimation of fratricide as a climax of the centralist policy.<sup>23</sup>

Before the 15<sup>th</sup> century, there are no known Ottoman historical accounts. However, as Cemal Kafadar points out “this must be seen as part of a broader phenomenon: the blooming of a literate historical imagination among the representatives of post-Seljuk frontier energies had to await the fifteenth century.”<sup>24</sup> Leaving aside the earliest works in which the narrative has a “historical” nature such as the popular epics, *Battal-name* and *Danişmend-name*,<sup>25</sup> the oldest account of early

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<sup>23</sup> For further details on this period, see Caroline Finkel, *Osman's Dream*, New York: Basic Books, 2005. p. 27-46.

<sup>24</sup> Cemal Kafadar, *Between Two Worlds. The Construction of the Ottoman State*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1995. p. 93.

<sup>25</sup> *Battal-name* and *Danişmend-name* are imbued with achievements of epic heroes and represent the idea of holy war. The origins of *Battal-nâme* genre pertain to the Arabic tribal sagas. Through time, some themes from Persian historical romances and popular tales were also integrated. Along with the fantastic elements, the corpus of stereotypes, especially Christians, touch on the social dynamics of that period and the disposition of Seyyid Battal - the main hero in these narratives – overlaps with the ideological agenda of the dervishes: to refrain from the carnal desires and to fight against the infidels. On the other hand, the dearth of humorous tone in *Danişmend-nâme* posited it as an “edited” version of the *Battal-name*, which probably stems from the fact that the written version was produced by Ârif Ali on the request of Murad II. See Hasan Köksal, *Battalnamelerde Tip ve Motif Yapısı*, Ankara: Kültür Bakanlığı Yayınları, 1982, p. 118-122.

Ottoman history, which was written for Prince Süleyman, emerged in the chaotic atmosphere caused by the defeat of 1402.<sup>26</sup> This historical account evaluated the disaster as “God's punishment for the sins committed under Bayezid I. He and his *vezir* Ali Pasha are accused of encroaching upon the *Sheri'at* (*Shari'a*) and introducing innovations in the government.”<sup>27</sup>

After the Timurid shock, the later chronicles by Aşıkpaşazade, Uruç and anonymous ones reflected the various perspectives of Mehmed II's imperial project, which can be also described as “the graduation from a frontier principality to an empire, with accompanying changes in the institutional and ideological spheres.”<sup>28</sup> However, this process was painful, especially for the losers. This, of course, led to resentment amidst various groups. To quote from Kafadar,

“Much of that resentment found expression in the chronicles and coalesced with the critique against the earlier centralization-cum-imperialization drive attributed to Bayezid I. But the most sweeping transformation and the broadest-based uproar came toward the end of Mehmed's reign when he confiscated more than a thousand villages that were held, as freehold or endowment, by descendants of early colonizers, mostly dervishes.”<sup>29</sup>

As can be seen through these examples, different versions of Ottoman historical writing of the 15<sup>th</sup> century should be analyzed within their own terms; “without looking for a one-to-one-correspondence between textual variations and ideological orientations, one can still search for patterns identifying distinct traditions before determining their value.”<sup>30</sup>

In fact, the contention on *gaza* and its relation to early Ottomans has been a problem for the scholars of this field. Rudy Lindner who challenges Wittek's thesis avers that the early Ottomans were “hardy” Muslims, therefore *gaza* was merely

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<sup>26</sup> Cemal Kafadar, *Between Two Worlds. The Construction of the Ottoman State*, p. 94.

<sup>27</sup> Halil İnalcık, “The Rise of Ottoman Historiography” in *Historians of the Middle East*, ed. by Bernard Lewis and P.M. Holt, London: Oxford University Press, 1962. p. 155.

<sup>28</sup> Kafadar, *Between Two Worlds*, p. 96.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 97. Also, For more information on these colonizer dervishes, see Ömer Lütfi Barkan's “Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Kolonizatör Türk Dervişleri”.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 103.

mirrored as a canonical war of Islam in the foundational Islamic texts. Kafadar evaluates this argument as essentialist and argues that such an interpretation reduces Ottoman historiography to the evolution of “state ideology”.<sup>31</sup> He also makes usage of metaphorical contrast between onion and garlic to stress the difference between Lindner’s and his own view. According to this, onion embodies Lindner’s understanding of Ottoman historiography, the core of which is Osman’s tribalism. Nevertheless, “[l]ayer upon layer has accumulated to conceal this core so that by the end of the fifteenth century, we are faced with a fully ripened onion. Accidents, mistakes, and crudities give us glimpses of the earlier, deeper layers.”<sup>32</sup> Kafadar emphasizes that the garlic metaphor is more congruous with the clusters of Ottoman historiography coalesced through oral and written accounts. More specifically, he rebuts the evolutionary view on the birth of Ottoman historiography and clarifies that incompatible accounts are not analogous in their representations of ideological camps.

The historical texts provide a reciprocal relationship with the political and social realities prevalent in the period in which they were produced. However, one should not assume that all the texts written in the same period automatically reflect the very same concerns and the anxieties. This is why each text should be analyzed through uncovering its peculiar author-text-reader triangle.

## **1.2. Accounts on the Conquest and the Reconstruction of Constantinople**

For the imperial claim shaped through Irano-Islamic, Turco-Mongol, and Roman-Byzantine traditions of kingship and sovereignty, Constantinople was surely an ideal capital. Mehmed II who realized an ancient dream of the Islamic world by conquering Constantinople, began to use an array of nomenclature: *hünkar*, *han*, sultan, *çâsâr* (caesar) and *ebu’l-feth*. In order to declare the seizure both the lands of Byzantium and its heritage, he also added the title of *Kayser-i Rum* (“Caesar of Rum”) to his title of *Sultanü’l-Berreyn ve Hakanü’l Bahreyn* (“the sultan of the two continents and the Hakan of the seas”). As this indicates, he invented a new court ceremonial underlying his absolute authority and sacredness. Thus, he reduced the power of landed aristocracy and the frontier lords and formed a new military-administrative elite

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 99.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

belonging to *devşirme* origin. By countering the potential challenge of the landed aristocracy with a bureaucratic elite, and transforming the religious scholars of all Ottoman madrasas into salaried employees of the centralized state, Mehmed II radically changed the power base of the empire, which was consolidated by *kanunname*.<sup>33</sup>

Nevertheless, with its fall, the Byzantine capital was in ruins therefore it necessitated a re-building process. In this process, the Byzantine heritage was not the absolute focus as it was selectively appropriated or rejected.<sup>34</sup> As Kafesçioğlu clarifies, this can be exemplified through the conversion of Hagia Sophia which was the religious and political center of Eastern Christendom, into the “the royal mosque of the city and the subsequent demolition of the equestrian statue of Justinian that stood nearby.”<sup>35</sup>

As İnalçık emphasizes, since the conquest of Constantinople “Ottoman sultans claimed a position of supremacy in the Islamic world, asserting that since the time of the first four caliphs, the companions of the Prophet, no other Muslim ruler could claim supremacy over the Ottoman sultans because of their unprecedented success in protecting and extending the domain of Islam against the infidels.”<sup>36</sup> To illustrate, Süleyman the Magnificent in his famous Bender inscription, mentions himself as the shah of Baghdad and Iraq, Caesar of the Roman lands and the Sultan of Egypt.<sup>37</sup>

The novel political and cultural configuration brought about a different dimension to Ottoman historical consciousness. In the decades following the conquest, there was an upsurge of prolific texts on the city, its history and its important sites. A corpus of Greek texts on the history and the monuments of the city –the *Patria*– was partially translated. The impact of this body of literature can be seen in the compilations of late medieval lore such as *Dürr-i Mekkun* and *Saltukname*. According to Yerasimos, the literature on the legends of the foundation of Constantinople was began to be used

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<sup>33</sup> Gülru Necipoğlu, *Architecture, Ceremonial, And Power*, Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1991. p. 20-21.

<sup>34</sup> Kafesçioğlu, *Constantinopolis/Istanbul: Cultural Encounter, Imperial Vision, and The Construction of Ottoman Capital*. University Park: Pa: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2009, p. 4.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Halil İnalçık, “State, Sovereignty and Law during the Reign of Süleyman” in *Süleyman the Second and His Time*, ed. H. İnalçık and C. Kafadar, İstanbul: Isis, 1993. p. 68.

<sup>37</sup> Salih Özbaran, *Bir Osmanlı Kimliği*, İstanbul: Kitap Yayınevi, 2004. p. 18.

as a literary means to criticize and reject the centralist and imperial project of Mehmed II. However such an argument seems to be a very broad generalization as each text should be analyzed within its own parameters. Moreover, setting such rigid correlations between literary works and the changes in politics is much more applicable for the texts of the modern era as one can “at least” distinguish the genres. As for the works of early modern era, there is a paucity of demarcation with regard to nomenclature; also one cannot easily define what is “literature” and what is “history” as they are intermingled.

Tursun Bey who was an eye-witness of the conquest relates how the Byzantine soldiery behaved and how the emperor perished due to a tumult. He accompanied Mehmed II during his first visit to Hagia Sophia. He depicted Mehmed II’s conquests to highlight their pivotal position consolidating the respected image of the Ottomans especially for the Islamic world. Actually, it was Bayezid II’s demand for the composition of an Ottoman history by which the superiority of the Ottomans would be shown to other rival Islamic dynasties in Iran and Egypt.<sup>38</sup> As İnalçık points out during the period in which Tursun was writing, “a violent conflict broke out between the Ottomans and the Mamluks, who backed and supported Djem Sultan and the Karamanid House in defiance of Bayezid II.”<sup>39</sup>

Educated in *medrese*, he clearly demonstrates his knowledge of “Turkish, Arabic, and Persian as well as of the subtleties of the literary arts, and his complete mastery of all the skills of a *münshi*.”<sup>40</sup> He belonged to the government secretarial (*kuttap*) class like Idris Bidlisi, Selaniki and Ali. Kenan İnan addresses to the panegyric element of the text and asserts that the introduction of *Tarih-I Ebü'l Feth* should be placed in the tradition of “Mirrors for Princes” literature.<sup>41</sup> In the introduction, Tursun expresses his gratitude to Mehmed II for his generosity towards him. He also underlines the unrealized desire of the Muslim rulers to conquer Constantinople: “many Muslim

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<sup>38</sup> Halil İnalçık, *The Survey of Istanbul: 1455*, İstanbul: Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, 2012. p. 648.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 649.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 643.

<sup>41</sup> Kenan İnan, “The Incorporation of Writings on Periphery in Ottoman Historiography: Tursun Bey's Comparison of Mehmet II and Bayezid II” in *Ottoman Borderlands: Issues, Personalities, and Political Changes*, ed. by Kemal H. Karpat and Robert W. Zens, Madison: Center of Turkish Studies, University of Wisconsin, 2003. pp. 105-117.

rulers seriously wanted to take this well-protected city and they prepared armies, but none of them being able to extend his hands to its strongly fortified skirt, they withdrew in disappointment with broken heart. Thus, the city was full upon the Islamic front as a wound and it was like a rosy mole on a cheek of graceful beloved one.”<sup>42</sup>

According to Tursun’s historical methodology and historical interpretation, history is only determined by God’s will. This reverberation of the basic Islamic belief underlines that the results of the projects undertaken by the Sultan can only be accomplished with the support and the will of God. İnalçık also highlights another feature of Tursun’s text:

“In the Ottoman state and the Islamic states which preceded it, there had existed an official or semi-official school of historiography which was based on official government documents, especially correspondence and memos to and from the Sultan (*talkhisat*). Histories written by historians of this school are detailed and all-inclusive, usually giving precise and accurate information about the events described and their dates of occurrence. Another category, or school of historical writing, on the other hand, was exhibited in the personal histories, based on the historian’s own reminiscences or experiences rather than on official documentation.”<sup>43</sup>

Since Tursun Bey’s history pertains to the second category, as he declares that his history hinges on either first person experience or the generally accepted knowledge, this leads to a set of problems in chronology and the array of protagonists. Despite these problems, Tursun Bey’s history is also one of the most reliable sources to understand Mehmed II’s personality, as İnalçık asserts. Moreover, Tursun Bey penned his text in the official literary prose style which reduced its popularity amidst the later generations of Ottoman historians such as Kemalpaşazade who seems obviously unaware of Tursun’s account.

Another eye witness of the period, Aşıkpaşazade Derviş Ahmed uses terms stressing the imperial imagery: *nevbet-i sultanî* (imperial drums) and *ceng-i sultanî* (imperial war). While his text is almost silent on the conquest of Constantinople, there is explicit criticism against the imposition of rent on the houses and shops in the newly-conquered city. Actually it is known that, due to this application of the rent, the re-population of the city was hindered since the first immigrants and the deported people

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<sup>42</sup> Tursun Bey, trans. by Halil İnalçık in *The Survey of Istanbul: 1455*, p. 513.

<sup>43</sup> Halil İnalçık, *The Survey of Istanbul: 1455*, p. 649-650.

fled the city.<sup>44</sup> In Aşıkpaşazade's account, the Muslims who came to the city after the conquest refuse to pay the rents: "...the City began to prosper, but then those who got a house were required to pay to the treasury a rent (*mukata'a*). This caused anxiety to the immigrants. They said: when you brought us here as forced migrants (*sürdünüz*), was it make us to pay a rent (*kira*) for those houses of the infidels. Thereupon, some of the settlers ran away leaving behind wife and children."<sup>45</sup> Aşıkpaşazade's emphasis on these regulations with negative connotations stems from his own possessions in the city.

Even though Constantinople was declared the capital soon after its conquest, this decision was only fulfilled in the 1460s. The first interventions following 1453, did not pertain to a great project, yet they functioned as responses to immediate and unexpected needs. As Kafesçioğlu avers, "Reflecting the sultan's decision to rebuild the city on a vast scale and endowing it with some of its powerful symbols, the projects of these years of orientation and reorientation simultaneously betray a lack of clarity regarding the status of the city and the possibilities offered by its topography."<sup>46</sup>

Especially the conversion of Hagia Sophia into a mosque was a dream dating back to the early centuries of Islam. This act refers to the starting of a process "central to the making of the Ottoman capital city, namely the selective appropriation of symbolically significant aspects of Byzantine Constantinople."<sup>47</sup> In his account, Tursun Bey provides a vivid description of the building with an emphasis on its heavenly qualities. According to him, this paradisaical beauty and its imperial connotations are woven as it can be also seen Tursun's image of Mehmed II pondering the church's vicinity in ruins.<sup>48</sup> Also, Doukas mentions the mesmerizing impact of Hagia Sophia on the sultan:

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<sup>44</sup> See Halil İnalçık, "The Policy of Mehmed II towards the Greek Population of Istanbul and the Byzantine Buildings of the City", *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 23, 1970. p. 231-249.

<sup>45</sup> Aşıkpaşazade, trans. by Halil İnalçık in *The Survey of Istanbul: 1455*, p. 581-582.

<sup>46</sup> Kafesçioğlu, *Constantinopolis/Istanbul*, p. 13.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18.

<sup>48</sup> "Pâdişâh-i cihân bunun sath-ı muka'arında olan acâyib ü garâyib san'atlerin ve temâsîlin temâşâ ittükten sonra, sath-ı muhaddebine uruç buyurdı; Rûhu'llah tabaka-i çârmîn-i âsümâna ûruc ider gibi tasa'ud itti. [...] Vaktâ ki bu binâ-yı hasînün tevâbi'ü levâhıkın harâbu yebâb gördi, âlemün sabâtsüzliğin ve karârsüzliğin ve âhır harâb olmasın fikr idüp, müte'essifen, nutk-ı şeker-pâşından bu beyt sem'-i fakîre yitişüp, levh-i dilde müntakış oldu: *Perde-dârî mî-küned der tâk-ı kisrâ ankebût / Bûm nevbet mî-zened der kal'a-i Efrâsiyâb*" Tursun Bey, *Tarih-i Ebü'l-Feth*, p. 64.



“Proceeding to the Great Church, he [Mehmed II] dismounted from his horse and went inside. He marveled at the sight! When he found a Turk smashing a piece of marble pavement, he asked him why he was demolishing the floor. ‘For the faith,’ he replied. He extended his hand and struck the Turk a blow with his sword, remarking ‘You have enough treasure and captives. The City’s buildings are mine.’ When the tyrant beheld the treasures which had been collected and the countless captives, he regretted his compact. The Turk was dragged by the feet and cast outside half dead.”<sup>49</sup>

In fact, Hagia Sofia functioned as a medium through which the importance of other buildings built after the conquest was measured. However, there were two exceptions: all large-scale mosques and convent-mosques built in the city under the reign of Mehmet II reflected iconic reference to Hagia Sophia. There was either a single half dome or two that strengthened a central sanctuary dome.”<sup>50</sup>

Of course, it is not difficult to visualize the reactions of the Christian world against the fall of Constantinople. The seeds of the trite theme on the fall of the city and the consequent end of the Greek civilization were instantly implanted in that period. The construction of a standard rhetorical topos stereotyping the Turks as a nomadic, barbarian people consolidated their image as the cultural opposite of Renaissance Europe. Nevertheless, this did not dissuade George of Trebizond – a Greek humanist scholar- and Pope Pius II from trying to convert Mehmed II to Christianity. Indeed, converting Islamic rulers to Christianity was not a novel phenomenon as this policy dating back to the 13<sup>th</sup> century, was adopted by St. Francis of Assisi in his attempt to convert the Fatimid caliph of Egypt. The pragmatic and the religious connotations in the Pope’s letter to Mehmed II were couched in the statement underlying that “victory in war does not prove truth in religion.” Such an argument reflects the late Byzantine view which “reacted to the shock of Islamic success on the battlefield by making a strong distinction between military and ‘spiritual’ conquest.”<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Doukas, *Decline and Fall of Byzantium To The Ottoman Turks*, trans. by Harry J. Magoulias. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1975. p. 231

<sup>50</sup> Kafesçioğlu, *Constantinopolis/Istanbul*, p. 20.

<sup>51</sup> James Hankins, “Renaissance Crusaders: Humanist Crusade Literature in Age of Mehmed II”, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, Vol. 49, Symposium on Byzantium and the Italians, 13th – 15th Centuries, 1995, pp. 111-207. p. 129.

The ample literature produced by Renaissance authors on the Turks is replete with comparisons and identifications of them with biblical villains such as the Assyrians, the Egyptians, Gog and Magog, Antichrist and Satan.<sup>52</sup> There was also an inclination to interpret the fall of Constantinople to the Turks in the context of great tragedies of antiquity. The comparisons to the sack of Rome by the Goths in 410, and later by the Vandals in 455 were of course imbued with a baggage of the “other” imaginary, yet the case with the Ottomans was more than a disaster for the humanists. One example of this thought can be observed in Niccolò Tignosi’s *Expugnatio Constantinopolitana* in which he claims that many Romans who fled the Goths were able to return and reconstruct the city, unlike the Greeks who were either killed or drowned while trying to escape.<sup>53</sup> Also, as an eyewitness to the fall of Constantinople, Nestor-Iskander draws a direct correlation between the sack of Troy and the current plight:

“The impious Mehmed sat upon the imperial throne and was honored by all those who exist under the sun. He won control and dominion over the settlements of two parts. He vanquished and conquered the city of Artaxerxes. He governed the boundlessness of the seas and commanded the breadth of the earth. He erased the marvelous ruined Troy, in which seventy kings had reigned and fourteen had defended it.”<sup>54</sup>

Indeed, to link the capture of Constantinople to a strategic necessity for the Ottomans is not very convincing as they had ostensibly no difficulty in ruling the adjacent lands.<sup>55</sup> However, since Constantinople functioned as a city-state, it inevitably distorted the territorial unity of the Ottoman domains. Besides, the symbolic value of the city which was stratified by centuries of Muslim effort, was a pivotal impetus for its conquest. As for the Arabic Islamic responses to the conquest, the event was fabulous as it finalized the millennial struggle amidst Islam and Byzantium. Nonetheless, this did not amount to attributing the political and military importance to the conquest since its

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<sup>52</sup> Margaret Meserve, *Empires of Islam in Renaissance Historical Thought*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008. p. 32.

<sup>53</sup> Nancy Bisaha, *Creating East and West: Renaissance Humanists and the Ottoman Turks*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004. p. 69.

<sup>54</sup> Nestor-Iskander, *The Tale of Constantinople (Of Its Origin and Capture by the Turks in the Year 1453)*, translated and annotated by Walter K. Hanak and M. Philippides, New Rochelle, NY: Aristide D. Caratzas, Publisher, 1998. p. 93-95.

<sup>55</sup> See Henry Randel Shapiro “Diverse Views on the Legitimacy of the Ottoman Sultanate among Greek Chroniclers of the Early Modern Period”, Unpublished MA Thesis, Sabancı University, 2011.

practical efficacy had already lost its significance for the Arabs. Admittedly, the imaginary dimension of the event merely hinged on the ideological and mythical plane which was a reminiscent of the theme of “wondrous city”. The next chapter will be devoted to this literary genre on Constantinople from a comparative perspective.

## CHAPTER II

### CITY OF MARVELS: LEGENDS ON CONSTANTINOPLE

The Ottoman texts on the formation of Constantinople are imbued with legendary elements. The main consensus in modern scholarship on the early modern Ottoman history asserts that these legendary elements which have also negative connotations with the city were consciously used to gainsay Mehmed II's imperial project. It is also asserted that in the following centuries these texts were also in circulation and shaped according to the writers's ideological stances. Here, it is necessary to pose a question: Can we analyze all the texts penned in different centuries or even periods, under the same political topos? Recent studies, such as Cumhur Bekar's, on the Ottoman historiography claim that only in the plane of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, in particular with Hezarfenn's narratives, a different pattern was begun to be followed.<sup>56</sup> While it is true to a certain extent Hezarfenn had a different attitude towards the Byzantium history, there is no exact answer to the question of whether his text is a continuation of a tradition or a total rejection against it. However, with the impact of changing power relations both in Europe and all around the world in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Hezarfenn and Katip Çelebi had an inclination towards Christianity and its history as it was accepted as the identity builder of the West. Thus, even though there was no apparent continuity between them and the tradition, in the background they shared the very same theme and concerns.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Cumhur Bekar, "Hezarfen Hüseyin's Universal History", p. 55.

<sup>57</sup> Special thanks to Burcu Gürgan for this information.

The first Ottoman text on legends about Constantinople is Yazıcıoğlu Ahmed Bican's *Dürr-i Meknun*. Actually the legends on Constantinople are not peculiar to the Ottomans as they hinge on a wide range of Muslim and Byzantine traditions. *Dürr-i Meknun* can be interpreted as a combination of these two literary canons. Especially in the Arabic-Islamic medieval literature the focus was not only on the physical appearance of the city, but also on its literary and historical associations. For the Arab Muslims, the knowledge of the Byzantine Empire meant knowledge of its territory as their desire was to capture it. While Muslim observers of the city attempted to orient themselves by organizing it spatially, they did not draw a total picture; rather, they just referred to a set of fixed coordinates. According to Nadia Maria El Cheikh, this is the reason why the corpus of Arabic-Islamic literature writings on Constantinople is static.<sup>58</sup>

In the Arabic-Islamic context, the popular beliefs and the legends about the city revolve around its antique monuments. In fact, in this literature, monuments and statues were perceived as having talismanic or magical power which protected the antique cities. Hence, this belief about the miracles was not peculiar to Constantinople as they also narrated in relation to various ancient Near Eastern cities. The wonders of Constantinople apropos to its walls, churches, palaces, mosaics, marble, gold and precious stones consolidated its imperial image. Despite its portrayal replete with magical talismans, the Arab travelers and writers did not reflect Constantinople as a visual turmoil or chaotic order. What is more, the city is harmonized, rationalized, and organized in their depictions.<sup>59</sup> Furthermore, not only Arabs, but also Western authors were impressed by Constantinople. To illustrate, Geoffroy de Villehardouin wrote during the conquest of the city by the Latins in A.D. 1204, "Many of our men, I may say, went to visit Constantinople, to gaze at its many splendid palaces and tall churches and view all the marvelous wealth of a city richer than any other since the beginning of time."<sup>60</sup> Even after the conquest of the city by Mehmed II, the theme of "marvelous city" preserved its place in the narrations about Constantinople. For instance, Pierre Gilles's *The Antiquities of Constantinople* which was penned upon his visit to the city in

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<sup>58</sup> Nadia Maria El Cheikh, *Byzantium Viewed by The Arabs*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004, p. 142.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 150.

<sup>60</sup> q. in Nadia Maria El Cheikh, *Byzantium Viewed by The Arabs*, p. 204.

1544, functioned as a “travel guide” to Constantinople of that time. Gilles did not only mention the mythological and historical background of the city, but also presented a survey of physical surroundings of the city.<sup>61</sup>

In order to fully understand the connotations of these depictions, an analysis of “’*aja’ib*” and “’*ghara’ib*” tradition is crucial. Literally, the Arabic word *’ajib* implies an object or a situation that brings about astonishment. Both of the terms and their derivatives are considerably used in the Quran. Roy P. Mottahedeh calls attention to their relation with *haira* and gives a quotation from Sura 18:9 which says: “They were wonders [’*ajaban*] among our signs. “They” in the verse refers to the *Ahl al-Kahf*, the Companions of the Cave, or the seven sleepers of Ephesus. As Mottahedeh puts it, the baggage of wondrous signs has a crucial place in homiletic literature since the theme of wonders in the Quran is posited to consolidate God’s presence.<sup>62</sup> *’Aja’ib* is also associated with the term “marvel” which has links to the Latin word *mirabilis*. Etymologically, the root of *mirabilia* is *mir* (as in *mirror*, *mirari*) which hints something visual.<sup>63</sup> In *Miroir du Merveilleux* (1962), Pierre Mabilie avers that for the men of the Middle Ages, there was a parallel between *mirabilia* and *mirror* which links “the marvel to the complex of images and ideology associated with the mirror.”<sup>64</sup>

This literary genre both in European and Islamic literatures has generally been ignored by the scholars. Nonetheless, a deep analysis of it can illuminate the embedded dimensions woven around the “wonders” and “marvels”. As Le Goff puts it, if “the history of words is history itself”, then the imagination sketched by the marvelous and wonder should interest us because it unravels changes in underlying attitudes and sensibilities.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Pierre Gilles, *The Antiquities of Constantinople*, Trans. by John Ball, New York: Italica Press, 1988. Also, on Islam and travel in the Middle Ages, see Houari Touati, *Ortaçağda İslam ve Seyahat: Bir Âlim Uğraşının Tarihi ve Antropolojisi*. (Çeviren: Ali Berktaş) İstanbul: YKY, 2004.

<sup>62</sup> Roy P. Mottahedeh, “’*Aja’ib* in *The Thousand and One Nights*,” in ‘*The Thousand and One Nights*’ in *Arabic Literature and Society*, eds. Richard G. Hovannisian and Georges Sabagh, Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1997, pp. 29-39. p. 30.

<sup>63</sup> Jacques Le Goff, *Medieval Imagination*, trans. by Arthur Goldhammer, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988, p. 27.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27-28.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

## 2. 1. Topography of Wonders and Marvels

A brief history of wonder shows us how arbitrary and variable its categories are. Narratives on wonder are multilayered, extending beyond any ontological or geographical boundaries. Even though they provide valuable information especially for social and intellectual history studies, particularly since the Enlightenment, it has been pushed towards the margins on grounds of its obscure position in science. Hence, a holistic analysis of wonder molded by cultural, intellectual and political dimensions is also a challenge to the traditional historiography of science and philosophy in many aspects. Actually, wonder has been considered as a fundamental part of philosophy as Aristotle wrote. According to him, wonder emerging from the ignorance about the causes of natural phenomena evoke the search for these causes and was therefore central to the philosopher's task. His impact on the eleventh-century Islamic philosopher Ibn Sina, known in Europe as Avicenna, is crucial to illustrate the affinities between the illustrated wonders of creation manuscripts produced in Islamic lands and the books of wonders belonged to Christian Europe. Aside from sharing classical heritage revolving around Aristotle and Pliny, the two branches began to emerge at nearly same time, that is, from 12<sup>th</sup> or 13<sup>th</sup> century to the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

The 1<sup>st</sup> century Roman writer Pliny the Elder and his *Natural History* functioned as the main source for the medieval writers who were greatly interested in mirabilia. Also, the effect of Pliny's works on Augustine's Book XXI imbued with wonders which were used as instruments to give moral lessons and prove the omnipotence of the Christian God should be touched here. Like Pliny's work which focuses on the variety and diversity of nature, Augustine begins his writing with examples of mirabilia pertaining to diverse geographies: mountains in Sicily "which have been fiercely ablaze from time immemorial down to the present day, yet still remain whole"; the flesh of the peacock which has the "property of not rotting after death"; the lodestone which "has the marvelous power of attracting iron" and was seen by Augustine's "brother" and fellow bishop Severus of Milevis in Bathanarius, "sometime count of Africa"; the fountain at the Garamantes which, "during the day, is so cold that no one can drink from it, but which, at night, is so hot that no one can touch it"; and "in Cappadocia the mares are impregnated by the wind, and their offspring live for no more than three years."<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Augustine, *The City of God Against the Pagans*, ed. and trans. by R. W. Dyson, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, p. 1048, 1051-1053.

Having given these “marvelous” examples, Augustine came to a conclusion which stresses the omnipotence of God and the impossibility of providing a rational explanation for them because:

“Our weak and mortal powers of reasoning are defeated by these and such wondrous works of God. But we should say also that our reason is persuaded that the Almighty does nothing without a cause, even though the frail human mind cannot explain what that cause is. We should say that, while we are in many cases uncertain as to what He intends, it is nonetheless quite certain that nothing which He intends is impossible to Him. And we should say that, when He declares His will to us, we believe Him, Whom we cannot believe to be either powerless or untruthful. Moreover, though those who reproach us for our faith demand rational explanations, what reply can they make when faced with those wonders of which the human reason can give no account, but which certainly exist and are seen to be contrary to the natural order of nature? If we said that they were to occur in the future, unbelievers would require a rational explanation of us, just as they require one for those events which we do say will occur in the future. Accordingly, just as these present works of God are not non-existent merely because human reason and speech lacks the power to explain them, so those things of which we are here speaking are not impossible merely because reason can give no account of them to men.”<sup>67</sup>

According to Augustine, what is apparently commonplace and what is apparently marvelous are not distinguishable as both of them are directly connected to the divine will.<sup>68</sup> In other words, everything created by God is wonderful, including the commonest works to the eyes of human beings. He also makes usage of the tropes of the ancient paradoxography so as to reshape the emotion of wonder. Hence, he rendered wonder “a serious and sobering emotion, dissolving its links with the more frivolous sorts of pleasure rooted in the experience of novelty and stressing instead its affinity with religious awe.”<sup>69</sup> Whereas the admiration of the marvelousness of creation might be sufficient for an ordinary believer per se, preachers, teachers and exegetes have to be qualified with the specialized lore about the features of natural things to interpret the Bible as it is replete with metaphors and similes taken from the natural world. As Augustine reflects in *On Christian Doctrine* (2.16):

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., p. 1054.

<sup>68</sup> Lorraine Daston & Katharine Park, *Wonders and The Order of Nature 1150-1750*, New York: Zone Books, 2001. p. 40.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.



“Ignorance of things, too, renders figurative expressions obscure, as when we do not know the nature of animals, or minerals, or plants, which are frequently referred to in Scripture by way of comparison. The fact so well known about the serpent, for example, that to protect its head it will present its whole body to its assailants-how much light it throws upon the meaning of our Lord’s command, that we should be wise as serpents; that is to say, that for the sake of our head, which is Christ, we should willingly offer our body to the persecutors, lest the Christian faith should, as it were, be destroyed in us, if to save the body we deny our God! [...] As, then, knowledge of the nature of the serpent throws light upon metaphors which Scripture is accustomed to draw from that animal, so ignorance of other animals, which are no less frequently mentioned by way of comparison, is a great drawback to the reader. And so in regard to minerals and plants: knowledge of the carbuncle, for instance, which shines in the dark, throws light upon many of the dark places in books too, where it is used metaphorically; and ignorance of the beryl or the adamant often shuts the doors of knowledge.”<sup>70</sup>

Obviously, for Augustine the familiarity with mirabilia and its link with the hermeneutics were very crucial. This was also valid for the corpus of medieval Christian texts on the wonders of natural world in which the main focus was the moral tone. To illustrate, the poisonous plant *Sardonian* embodied that “the joys of this world bring death.”<sup>71</sup> In illustrated medieval bestiaries, the juxtaposed images of wonderful animals with the common ones were imbued with moral or allegorical connotations. In *Physiologus*, the section on the lion begins with the statement: “Jacob, blessing his son Judah, said, “Judah is a lion's whelp”” and draws a parallel between it and the Savior: “The spiritual lion of the tribe of Judah, the root of David, having been sent down by his coeternal Father, hid his intelligible tracks from the unbelieving Jews: an angel with angels, an archangel with archangels, a throne with thrones, a power with powers, descending until he had descended into the womb of a virgin to save the human race which had perished.”<sup>72</sup> Likewise, beast-headed evangelist portraits in Latin Gospels produced at Landévennec, Brittany, late 9th or early 10th century, expose the rhetorical uses of this sort (Figure II.1.).

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<sup>70</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *City of God and Christian Doctrine*, ed. by Philip Schaff, New York: The Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1890. p. 908.

<sup>71</sup> Quotation from M.R. James, “Ovidius *De mirabilibus mundi*”, in *Wonders and The Order of Nature 1150-1750*, p. 41.

<sup>72</sup> Michael J. Curley, (Translated by). *Physiologus : A Medieval Book of Nature Lore*, Chicago, IL, USA: University of Chicago Press, 2009. p. 53.



**Figure II.1.** Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS. Auct. D. 2. 16, fol. 71v.

As well as bestiaries, herbals and lapidaries did not only provide practical information and moral lessons but they also put emphasis on what Augustine considered fundamental for biblical exegesis.<sup>73</sup> Especially the clerical encyclopedias of 13<sup>th</sup> century were replete with Augustine's main message that everything created was wonderful whether they were marvelous or commonplace. However, Augustine's conception of wonder surrounded by fear which was consolidated through the images of eternal torture: "it seems more incredible that bodies will endure in everlasting torments than that they will remain without any pain in eternal blessedness."<sup>74</sup> Of course, this theme

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<sup>73</sup> *Wonders and The Order of Nature 1150-1750*, p. 41.

<sup>74</sup> *The City of God Against the Pagans*, p. 1044.

was replaced by pleasure in the texts like that of Mandeville and Marco Polo which will be discussed in the succeeding parts.

Not surprisingly, the lacuna in Augustinian thought which left out any linkage between wonders and natural causes was rejected by medieval authors. Even though Thomas of Cantimpré, Vincent of Beauvais and Bartholomaeus Anglicus can be named as Augustinian allegiances, they had an inclination to novel view of natural order derived from Galen and Aristotle. This was mainly due to the fact that Greek and Arabic natural philosophical sources on the ideas of natural order began to be translated into Latin in the 12<sup>th</sup> century and these became available to philosophically trained European readers and writers.<sup>75</sup>

These writers alluded to above had in common a willingness to extol the God as the supreme might through his wonders. However the attempts to challenge this idea did not wait for long due to the arguments set by academic natural philosophers. They interpreted wonder as a usual response to an unknown cause stripped of the armory of religious explanations. Simply put, “they did not reject wonders as illusory, still less as miraculous, but merely labeled them as *praeter naturam* (outside or beyond the course of nature) and therefore irrelevant to the natural philosopher’s work.”<sup>76</sup> Therefore, the concept of wonder in the scholastic panorama evoked disdain which was verbalized through this novel philosophical agenda emerging in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. The collapse of the Western Roman Empire marred the traditions of schooling and philosophical inquiry, yet more than six hundred years succeeding it, some Latin intellectuals in marginal numbers turned their faces to Byzantium and the Islamic world in an attempt to establish a rapport with the legacy of ancient Greek thought. Adelard of Bath, a notable figure of such group, criticized Augustinian tradition and emphasized the importance of rational explanation. On the basis of this preference, Adelard’s ideas disparaged wonder as it was considered to sentence Christians to backwardness and laggardness in terms of intellectual inquiry. Despite of the fact that Adelard unearthed the authority of Aristotle, his suspicion of wonder is indicative of his ignorance of Aristotelian corpus which posits wonder as the ultimate task of the philosopher. Nevertheless, for Aristotle, wonder stemming from ignorance about the reasons of

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<sup>75</sup> *Wonders and The Order of Nature 1150-1750*, p. 49.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 110.

natural phenomena triggered human beings to seek for answers and thereby it was central to philosophical inquiry. The 10<sup>th</sup> century scholar Ibn Sina, known in the Latin West as Avicenna, appears to have walked much the same path:

“If [...] natural things have principles, reasons, and causes without which the science of physics could not be attained, then the only way to acquire genuine knowledge of those things possessing principles is, first, to know their principles and, from their principles, to know them, for this is the way to teach and learn that gives us access to the genuine knowledge of things that possess principles.”<sup>77</sup>

Wonder that was perceived through the panorama of scholastic environment was explicitly despised in a series of influential interpretations of the *Metaphysics*, beginning with two penned by Roger Bacon. His patent disdain for wonder was akin to Adelard’s view. Moreover, he also acknowledged that “Aristotle had not meant to say that wonder was in any strict sense the cause of philosophy but only its ‘occasion’, moving the philosopher to flee from it as a frightened man flees from a battle.”<sup>78</sup> German Dominican writer Albertus Magnus’s corpus of expositions of Aristotle underpins the relation between wonder and fear. For him, wonder stems from the encounter with the unknown which generates fear. His distaste for wonder was also transmitted to his student, Thomas Aquinas. He gives a trivial place to wonder in his great summa of theology, stressing its link with pleasure and inquiry. Simply put, while theologians associated wonder with fear, for philosophers it had a stringent association with ignorance of causes.

Also, in the Islamic tradition, the definition of ‘*ajab*’ as “the change of the *nafs* [spirit or soul] through something the cause of which is unknown and goes out of the ordinary” became a standard usage by scholastics.<sup>79</sup> Even though being out of the ordinary is the last element of ‘*ajab*’, it was this element that drew a considerable attention in Arabic and Islamic thought and accounts for the diversity of things

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<sup>77</sup> Avicenna, *The Physics of The Healing*, Translated and Introduced by Jon McGinnis, Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 2009. p. 4.

<sup>78</sup> *Wonders and The Order of Nature 1150-1750*, p. 112.

<sup>79</sup> Quotation from Jurjāni’s book of definitions by Roy P. Mottahedeh in “‘*Aja’ib* in *The Thousand and One Nights*,” p. 30.

sometimes considered wondrous and marvelous according to varying taste of medieval authors.<sup>80</sup> This explains why *'aja'ib* has been used interchangeably in different contexts.

In the Ottoman context, it is not surprising to come across the use of *'aja'ib* in diverse themes. Considering the scope of this study, I will confine my analysis to the wonders-of-creation genre in the Ottoman Empire. Indeed, Ottoman wonders-of-creation genre was multilingual, while under the Safavids (1501-1736) and the Qajars (1796-1925) its praxis was in Persian. Hence, before analyzing the perceptions of this genre in the Ottoman lands of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, a synoptic view on Qazwini's *'Aja'ib al-Makhlukat wa-Ghara'ib al-Mawjudat* (*The Wonders of Creation and the Oddities of Existence*) and its impact on *Dürr-i Meknun* is necessary to mention here.

## **2.2. 'Aja'ib al-Makhlukat on Ottoman Scene**

The 13<sup>th</sup> century author Zakariyya b. Muhammad al-Qazwini's *'Aja'ib al-Makhlukat wa-Ghara'ib al-Mawjudat* is one of the most ubiquitous of all pre-modern Islamic illustrated books in the studies of Islamic art historians. The reasons of this are understandable, as this particular title is intertwined with the genre of Islamic wonders-of-creation books. Thus, in a sense, the genre and Qazwini's *'Aja'ib al-Makhlukat* have been used interchangeably. However, the dearth of studies on *'Aja'ib al-Makhlukat* has shadowed its importance in the pre-modern Islamic world. Besides, identifying Qazwini's manuscripts is another major problem in cataloging, as cataloguers have generally a tendency to incorrectly name a work as a Qazwini manuscript depending on a degree to which it was influenced by Qazwini manuscripts, even though it pertains to a different genre. An example for this can be given through the scribe Ahmad al-Havari's manuscript completed in 1388, probably in Baghdad, which is now exhibited in Paris and described as a Qazwini manuscript. Also, the fact that most of the manuscripts used today made in 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries should be also taken into consideration. Only in the manuscript catalogues of Turkey, there are more than forty copies of Qazwini's *'Aja'ib al-Makhlukat* which necessitates the initial identification of each manuscript.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Roy P. Mottahedeh in "'Aja'ib in *The Thousand and One Nights*," p. 30.

<sup>81</sup> For a long discussion on Qazwini's manuscript, see Persis Berlekamp, *Wonder, Image and Cosmos in Medieval Islam*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2011. p. 6-8.

Examples of Ottoman translations of *'Aja'ib al-Makhlūqat* do not present a general section in Turkish manuscript catalogues as they are posited under various titles ranging from geography, cosmology, travel, knowledge, encyclopedia to science. This plethora of the titles shows that there is no consensus in modern scholarship regarding the classification of these manuscripts. This becomes an important point for understanding the linchpins of *'Aja'ib al-Makhlūqat* in Ottoman context. Is it a general nomenclature for all the literature dealing with the theme of *aja'ib* and *ghara'ib*?

However, as Qazwini's *'Aja'ib al-Makhlūqat* and Ahmed Bican's *Dürr-i Meknun* are the examples of cosmology, the focus in this study will be given to the dynamics of this genre in Ottoman context. In broad terms, the classification of Ottoman cosmographies emerges in three categories: Ottoman translations of Qazwini's *'Aja'ib al-Makhlūqat* or that of Al-Tusi (the text is known by several titles: *The Wonders of Creation ('Aja'ib al-Makhlūqat)*, *The Book of Wonders ('Aja'ibnama)*, and *The World-Showing Glass (Jam-i Gītī Nama)* and there is almost no concrete knowledge about its author who wrote the text in Persian in the second half of the 12<sup>th</sup> century), Ottoman translations of the *Kharidat al-'Aja'ib* (by pseudo-al-Wardi), and synthetic compositions written under the impact of these two cosmographies.

The very first Ottoman work labeled as *'Aja'ib al-Makhlūqat* is indeed, the earliest Ottoman geographical work titled *Terceme-i 'Aja'ib al-Makhlūqat* by Ali bin Abdurrahman. Even though the text is undated, it can roughly be inferred from the statement that Edirne is the Ottoman capital.<sup>82</sup> Another work dated around the first half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century was also titled as *Terceme-i 'Aja'ib al-Makhlūqat* and attributed to Rukneddin Ahmed. The attempts to discover its author or translator has been in vain, thereby Günay Kut's argument indicating that the word "rukn ed-din" (pillar of religion) is a part of the preceding prayer, not the name of the author sounds reasonable.<sup>83</sup> The only well-known fact concerning the text is its presentation to Mehmed I.<sup>84</sup> Also, Günay Kut points out that the structure of the text is parallel to Persian style of *'Aja'ib al-Makhlūqat*. To illustrate, the work is divided into ten chapters

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<sup>82</sup> Günay Kut, *Acâibü'l-mahlūkât: Eski Türk Edebiyatı Araştırmaları*, İstanbul: Simurg Yayınları, 2010.p. 4.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>84</sup> Cevdet Türkay, *Osmanlı Türklerinde Coğrafya*, İstanbul: Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı Yayınları, 1999. p. 12.

on the marvels of heavens, fire, earth, water and seas, famous cities and mosques, trees and herbs, engraved figures and talismans, human nature, jinns and demons, birds, monsters of land and sea.<sup>85</sup>

Another *'Aja'ib al-Makhlūqat* by Ahmed Bican Yazıcızade of Gallipoli is the most copied one, as its copies have reached the number of fifty. The problems regarding translations made in medieval and early modern era also emerges here. For example, Charles Rieu who analyzed a copy of the work at the British Museum asserts that the work was presented as an Arabic translation of a Hebrew book that was composed by the savants in the age of Alexander the Great to demonstrate the wonders of the world.<sup>86</sup> Nevertheless, Rieu also indicates that the text was an abridged version of Qazwini's text while Günay Kut states that the translation was based upon Persian translations of *'Aja'ib al-Makhlūqat*. Thus, the challenges in the studies of manuscript cultures stem from the arbitrariness of translators (*mütercim*) and copyists (*müstensih*) can also be observed here. Considering all of these details, Christoph K. Neumann claims that manuscripts should be analyzed as collective works.<sup>87</sup>

Admittedly, Ahmed Bican's work is one of the numerous Ottoman Turkish translations of Qazwini's book. A synoptic translation by Mustafa b. Muslihiddin b. Şaban (d. 1561), aka Süruri, who was a poet and scholar, includes illustrated manuscripts. The translation was penned upon the request of Kanuni's son Mustafa Çelebi who bought Qazwini's *'Aja'ib al-Makhlūqat* from a Meccan merchant.<sup>88</sup> Nonetheless, the catastrophic murder of Prince Mustafa Çelebi upon the order of his father affected Süruri negatively as it also hindered the completion of the translation. It was only in 1685, the translation was completed by Rodosizade Mehmed Efendi under the title *Tekmile-i Terceme-i 'Aja'ib al-Makhlūqat*. A distinguishing feature of the Süruri manuscripts is the images that illustrate relations between different parts of the cosmos within the single image. Since the early medieval Arabic manuscripts inventory the

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<sup>85</sup> Günay Kut, *Acâibü'l-mahlūkât: Eski Türk Edebiyatı Araştırmaları*, p. 5-6.

<sup>86</sup> See Charles Rieu (ed.), *Catalogue of Turkish Manuscripts in British Museum*, Osnabrück: Otto Zellar Verlag, 1978.

<sup>87</sup> Christoph K. Neumann, "Üç Tarz-ı Mütalaa", "Yeniçağ Osmanlı Dünyası'nda Kitap Okumak ve Yazmak", in *Tarih ve Toplum: Yeni Yaklaşımlar*, (1) 241, 2005. p. 61-63.

<sup>88</sup> Günay Kut, *Acâibü'l-mahlūkât: Eski Türk Edebiyatı Araştırmaları*, p. 7.

order of the cosmos, their images depict this order collectively. The most common image of cosmic order delineates the earth held up by an angel standing on a bull who stands on a big fish resting on water. This intriguing image of the world's precarious foundational substructure burgeoned from the roots of Islamic thought.<sup>89</sup>

The history of the illustrated Arabic Qazwini manuscripts in the Ottoman Empire provides interesting examples which also deserve further study. Seemingly, talismanic and apocalyptic discourses permeated the Ottomans' interpretations of wonders-of-creation genre. Especially the manuscript designed for Sultan Süleyman (r. 1520-1566), known as the Magnificent in western European parlance and the Lawgiver in Ottoman historiography, embodies apocalyptic premise for the ideological frame of his reign. The remarkable aspect of the illustrations in the manuscript is the focus of the human role in interacting with other wonders in a manner that did not occur in the medieval manuscripts.<sup>90</sup> Within the context of Sultan Süleyman's rivalry with Charles V (Habsburg) and Shah İsmail (Safavid), the exuberant and eclectic imagery in the prophetic texts "increasingly centered on the possibility that the millennial empire was at hand (both within and between Latin Christian and Ottoman Muslim ambits), and their valence reached a crescendo in the mid-1530s."<sup>91</sup> The discourse on cosmographic order and a possible apocalypse formed a strong ambience at Süleyman's court especially with the anticipation of millennial year, 1000 AH (1591-2 CE). Persis Berlekamp draws parallel between the wake of Mongol Conquest in 13<sup>th</sup> century and these conditions of the 16<sup>th</sup> century in which the early Arabic version of Qazwini's cosmography text laid out the normative order of the world created by God. Berlekamp also avers that the cultural heritage of the medieval Arab lands had a more central position in the 16<sup>th</sup> century Ottoman court than in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, as a result of the fall of the Mamluks in 1517, which led to Arab lands under Mamluk control had been subsumed into the Ottoman Empire.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Persis Berlekamp, *Wonder, Image and Cosmos in Medieval Islam*. p. 158.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Cornell H. Fleischer, "Ancient Wisdom and New Sciences in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries," in *Falnama: The Book of Omens*, ed. Massumeh Farhad, London: Thames & Hudson, 2010, 231-243. p. 237.

<sup>92</sup> Persis Berlekamp, *Wonder, Image and Cosmos in Medieval Islam*. p. 161.



Obviously then, the Arabic Qazwini manuscript composed for Sultan Süleyman highlights the cultural narrative of the 16<sup>th</sup> century Ottoman court. This is also the case with Ahmed Bican's own cosmographic work, *Dürr-i Meknun*. The cosmographic framework of the work does not only sheds light on the Ottoman perceptions of wonders-of-creation genre influenced by Qazwini in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, but also underlines its importance in the author's cosmographic hierarchy of creation concluding with the Last Days.

### 2.2.1. Qazwini and Ahmed Bican

What is known about Qazwini's life is enough to understand the formative milieu of wonders-of-creation genre. Owing to the Mongol massacre in the northern Iranian city of Qazvin in 1220, many intellectuals like Qazwini fled. Finally, at Mosul, Qazwini was trained in philosophy and his deep knowledge on it matured under al-Abhari (d. 1264) who was a leading philosopher of his period. Nevertheless, he did not pursue a career as a philosopher, rather he became an expert on Islamic law and made his living as a qadi (judge for Muslims). He served as the qadi in Wasit and nearby Hilla, and taught in al-Madrassa al-Sharabiyya. Wasit under Ilkhanid rule was his last station as he died there in 1283.<sup>93</sup>

Qazwini's work, *'Aja'ib al-Makhlūqat wa-Ghara'ib al-Mawjudat* (*The Wonders of Creation and the Oddities of Existence*), was composed as a manuscript for Qazwini himself in Wasit, 1280. The work itself is not philosophical per se, yet it is imbued with intellectual perceptions of various wonders reflecting the divine power, and in this sense, it is in accordance with the main purpose of the Islamic wonders-of-creation manuscripts. The remarkable aspect of four Qazwini manuscripts which are the 1280 Wasit manuscript, two made in southern Iran in the early 1320s, and the one most probably made in Mosul c. 1300, is the strong similarities between the paintings stressing cosmic order. The designed cosmos in the manuscripts was hierarchically arranged, and apropos to Neoplatonic model of creation that was known in the medieval Islamic world due to the influential works of Ibn Sina. Actually, the cosmic order in these manuscripts does not give the main focus to what can be named as "strange" and "marginal", rather they widely deal with what was known and orderly. The reasons

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid., p. 13-14.

behind this choice are explicit as the Mongol Conquest of the mid-13<sup>th</sup> century had a momentous impact on the earliest producers of wonders-of-creation manuscripts. The conquest led to the fall of Baghdad in 1258, and the shock of the events made the intellectual circles of the period apply to apocalyptic terms while describing the disasters. Also, the conceptualization of the familiar and known things was necessary for them to remember that there was still a cohesive, divinely arranged cosmos in contrast to the chaotic plight of the upheaval of the era.<sup>94</sup>

Concomitantly with the corpus of Avicennian philosophical tradition, Qazwini's cosmology was also hierarchically organized. The classification of the wonders is arranged according to their proximity to God. Therefore, the celestial realm, including the angels appears first in the manuscripts. The terrestrial realms follow it, yet each realm is divided into its own hierarchical unit. The ranking can be summarized as: first main section on heavens about celestial bodies, angels, weather, mountains, rivers, seas and inhabitants, the section on earth about trees, plants, animals, and the final section on strange breeds like Gog and Magog<sup>95</sup> and so-called "Munsak" people who had ears like those of elephants, so that while sleeping they could use one as a mattress and the other as a blanket (Figure II.2.). Interestingly, at the last level of Qazwini's cosmic hierarchy there are strange and peculiar wonders. Also, what is defined as "wonder" changes with each classification in this large scale. It seems that for Qazwini, wonders can include oddities but these two are not synonymous. While in the case of medieval and early modern Europe, wonders are associated with rare, mysterious and real,<sup>96</sup> in Qazwini's work, strange and rare oddities are only a subset of wonders. This can be also understood through Qazwini's usage of Arabic terminology. He gives examples of stars, human body, camel and the bee as natural wonders which belong to the terms '*ajab*' (wonder) and '*aja'ib*' (wonders), and for the unfamiliar wonders namely miracles, eclipses, earthquakes, asteroids and conjoined twins, he refers to the terms '*gharib*' (strange or oddity) and '*ghara'ib*' (oddities). Like St. Augustine, Qazwini admits that these unfamiliar experiences might be hard for the reader to believe, yet nothing is beyond God's power. In this way, he accords with the didactic tone in his introduction

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>96</sup> Lorraine Daston & Katharine Park, *Wonders and The Order of Nature 1150-1750*, p. 23.

which explains the aim of the work is to induce the reader to wonder at God's creation. Qazwini's articulation of wonder or *'aja'ib* as "the sense of bewilderment a person feels because of his inability to understand the cause of a thing" finds its close parallels in the works of other medieval religious scholars such as Thomas Aquinas.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Quoted by Persis Berlekamp in *Wonder, Image and Cosmos in Medieval Islam*. p. 23.



**Figure II.2.** The strange breeds. *The Wonders of Creation and The Oddities of Existence* by Qazwini. Istanbul, Süleymaniye Library, MSS Yeni Cami 813.

Thus, such an eclectic cluster of wonders in Qazwini's work does not overlap with the post-Enlightenment polarities which define fantastic and legendary as "wonder" in contrast to real and historical. A modern scholar, Syrinx von Hees even claims that the association of the concept of medieval Islamic literary genre only with wonders (*'aja'ib*) is a modern construction, and points out that "the attention of all authors who use the concept of 'aḡā'ib literature is focused not on fairy tales and epics, but on books that somehow lay claim to be scientific."<sup>98</sup> As for Qazwini's own 1280 manuscript, Von Hees calls attention to the dominance of natural things which are also recognized as real in today's modern world. Considering the fact that perceptions of wonder have changed throughout the centuries as its criteria is not stable, the historical analysis of wonder and wonders particularly in Islamic context has been a controversial subject and no precise approach with definite boundaries can comprehensively evaluate them.

One approach taking into consideration that the European Christian and the Islamic traditions on wonder and wonders both emanated at nearly the same time, focuses on the nexus of classical heritage, so that draws parallels between Islamic wonders-of-creation illustrated manuscripts and the ones composed in Christian Europe. Even though Aristotelian tradition vocalized in Islamic and European languages followed somewhat different vestiges in both patterns, the early Qazwini manuscripts present their affinities with European tradition. The images in Islamic wonders-of-creation manuscripts are generally compared with dog-headed men (Figure II. 3., and Figure II.4.). In fact, in the examples apropos to European canon, the wonders have been interpreted as the signs of otherness in terms of geographical differences.<sup>99</sup> This can be also said for the late medieval and early modern Islamic illustrated wonders-of-creation manuscripts which provide fertile space to examine the perceptions of remote and unique. Despite of the fact that approaching the genre as a whole through aiming to uncover how the "other" is constructed in contrast to the self is helpful in understanding geographical experiences of Muslim travelers in the late medieval and early modern

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<sup>98</sup> Syrinx Von Hees, "The Astonishing: A Critique and Re-Reading of 'Aḡā'ib Literature," *Modern Eastern Literatures*, 8:2, 2005, 101-120. p. 103.

<sup>99</sup> Marco Polo mentions the dog-headed denizens of the Andaman Islands: "The inhabitants are idolaters, and are a most brutish and savage race, having heads, eyes and teeth resembling those of the canine species." in *The Travelers of Marco Polo*, Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Classics of World Literature, p. 223.

period, it does not have much to say on what the earliest examples of wonders-of-creation genre were about.



**Figure II.3.** Dog-headed men. *Livre des merveilles*. Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France online.



**Figure II. 4.** Dog-headed men. *The Wonders of Creation and The Oddities of Existence* by Qazwini. Istanbul, Süleymaniye Library, MSS Yeni Cami 813.

Besides, there are also other images with visual simplicity and are posited in a lower position according to hierarchy of creation. However, considering the simplicity of iconic images such as the camel and bee, how one can expect that they induce wonder in the reader? An answer to this question comes with Qazwini's discussion of wonder which underlines a sense of disorientation due to a failure to perceive a natural cause. Qazwini then presents an elaborated discussion on the example of bee through alluding to the Quranic verses: "And your Lord inspired to the bee, 'Take for yourself among the mountains, houses, and among the trees and [in] that which they construct.'" (16: 68). Likewise, Qazwini mentions the wondrous properties of the bee:

"If a person sees a beehive, and has not seen one previously, he will become bewildered because he does not understand who made it. If he then learns that it is the work of the bee, he will be bewildered again by how this weak creature makes these hexagons, the likes of which a skilled engineer would be unable to make with compass and ruler."<sup>100</sup>

The illustrations of the bee in manuscript made in Southern Iran in 1322 were introduced with the term *ṣūra* which can be translated as "picture/form". The term was commonly used amidst the medieval philosophers writing in Arabic to refer to a Platonic Form.<sup>101</sup> This abstraction invites the reader to an intellectual status of wonder. This example serves to induce the reader to wonder at God's creation, as every created wonder is sign of the God albeit it is familiar or not. Another entry on the camel in the encyclopedia also reflects this idea. Qazwini remarks that even though the camel is a created wonder, its wonder has fallen from people's eyes as they see it so much.<sup>102</sup> He goes on to map out the reasons why the camel inspires wonder: its durability and capacity to carry heavy belongings. The artist of the manuscript at Süleymaniye Library, MSS Yeni Cami, portrays the camel as God created it (Figure II. 5.). Thus, the visual image consolidates what the text implies: the more the reader knows about the familiar wonders, the more amazing they become. These visual contemplations are posited to accelerate the mental process of inquiry to finally recognize the wonder of God's creation.

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<sup>100</sup> Quoted by Persis Berlekamp in *Wonder, Image and Cosmos in Medieval Islam*. p.40.

<sup>101</sup> Persis Berlekamp in *Wonder, Image and Cosmos in Medieval Islam*. p. 42.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, p.43.



**Figure II. 5.** Camels. *The Wonders of Creation and The Oddities of Existence* by Qazwini. Istanbul, Süleymaniye Library, MSS Yeni Cami 813.

The visual focus on a particular created wonder embodies the Neoplatonic idea that the visible things do not only have the visible forms, but also invisible ones. Therefore, the *şūra* / “form” of the camel on the manuscript stands both for its visible image and invisible essential alluding to the Platonic Form.<sup>103</sup> This also resonates with Ibn Sina’s description of the way through which people can discern truth. For Ibn Sina, truth is abstract and most people can only perceive it through a process called “conceptualization ... in the soul”. Notably, the word used for conceptualization is *tasawwur* which pertains to the same root as *şūra* (picture, image, Form).<sup>104</sup>

Ahmed Bican’s *Dürr-i Meknun*, which has an appearance of an encyclopedic work, reflects the same cosmic order delineated in Qazwini’s work. Even though it is not a voluminous work, it dabbles in cosmographic tradition in parallel to Qazwini’s narrative line. *Dürr-i Meknun* consists of 18 chapters dealing with:

1. The creation of the Earth and skies, the throne and the footstool, the tablet and stylus, different levels of paradise and hell, and the marvelous creatures living there,
2. The Earth,

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., p. 46.



3. The Earth and its creatures,
4. Seven climes,
5. The wonders of mountains,
6. Seas, islands and the creatures living there,
7. Cities and regions,
8. Mosques and churches,
9. The prophet-king Solomon,
10. The story of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba,
11. Physiognomy,
12. Stories about the places destroyed by the wrath of God,
13. Herbs, fruits, and stones,
14. Geographical wonders and historical anecdotes,
15. The tale of legendary bird Simurg,
16. The science of onomancy (*jafr*),
17. The omens of the Last Hour,
18. The transitory of the world and a long prayer.

After the introduction part in which Ahmed Bican maps out the reasons to compose his work, he begins the first chapter with the story of emanation which is akin to Qazwini' narration. The story narrates how heaven and earth were created from a green gem which melted and changed into water when God stared at it. In a similar way, water became foamy and was separated into foam and vapor. The winds were made through this vapor while God created the heavens in the form of seven layers from this foam. He also used the frozen part of the same foam to create the earth, mountains, rivers and hills.<sup>105</sup> However, Ahmed also comments on the smallness of the world in contrast to magnificence of heavens by uttering: "this world is like an island in the sea."<sup>106</sup>

The depiction of the Earth in *Dürr-i Meknun* resembles to the portrait of seven

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<sup>105</sup> "Eydürler ki o andan sonra Hak te'ala Arş'ı bir yeşil cevherden yaratdı. [...] Arşın altı kerre yüzbin ayağı vardır. Dahi altı kerre yüzbin perdesi vardır. Herbiri yerlerden ve göklerden büyüktür. Ka'bü'l-Ahbar (r. a.) eydir: Ol vakit su çalkalandı yeller peyda oldu. Hak te'ala ol yelleri cem' eyledi. Yellerin üzerine suyu vaz' eyledi. Suyun üzerine Arş'ı koydu. Şimdi Arş su üzerindedir. Andan, Arş'a kendi hükmeyledi" *Dürr-i Meknun*, p. 23.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., p. 61.

heavens and seven earths posited one above another in the Qur'an.<sup>107</sup> Ahmed Bican mentions a giant snake which covers the all heavens. According to the portrayal, the snake has four heads, each one of them has seven hundred thousand faces and each face has a thousand mouths which have a thousand tongues. These tongues have distinct languages that praise God. Also, the head of this gigantic snake was made of white pearl, its body was made of rose gold, and its eyes were made of ruby.

The traditional narration woven around Mountain Qaf forms a symbolization of it as a direct control of God. Moreover, it also serves to explain the natural events such as earthquakes and also the color of the sky. Ahmed Bican describes the essence of Mountain Qaf as a navy-blue meteor from Paradise.<sup>108</sup> Also, Mountain Qaf as well as other mountains, are posited as stakes that saves the Earth from being shaken. While this aspect has a direct reference in the Qur'an, *Dürr-i Meknun* also indicates that the Sura of the Footstool (*ayat al-Kursi*) was written by an angel that protects Mountain Qaf lest it is not shaken.<sup>109</sup>

The question about how the Earth stands in balance finds its explanations in the cosmologies of the medieval Islamic world. Actually, the earliest examples of these explanatory ideas emerge in *Qisas al-anbiya* of at-Thalabi and al-Kısaı in which the crucial point is that the Earth stands in balance through an angel, a bull and a fish.<sup>110</sup> Even though the story of this image cannot be found in *Dürr-i Meknun*, there are few anecdotes about the bull and the fish. To illustrate, it is mentioned that the angel who is responsible for Mountain Qaf, keeps the balance of the Earth, the bull and the fish lest a wind sweeps them.<sup>111</sup>

As for the shape of the world, *Dürr-i Meknun* asserts that it is round, and half of the Earth is submerged, and some parts rise in order to form islands.<sup>112</sup> The world is replete with '*aja'ib* and '*ghara'ib* as they are the reflections of God's magnificence. Not

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<sup>107</sup> See verses, 41:11-12, 67:3.

<sup>108</sup> *Dürr-i Meknun*, p. 44.

<sup>109</sup> See verses 78:6-7. *Dürr-i Meknun*, p. 44.

<sup>110</sup> Feray Coşkun, "A Medieval Islamic Cosmography in an Ottoman Context", MA Thesis, İstanbul: Boğaziçi University, 2007. p. 109.

<sup>111</sup> *Dürr-i Meknun*, p. 58.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, p.54.

only natural beings but also artificial entities such as ornamented buildings of the Antiquity. Especially cities that are attached to a Greek or Roman past, like Constantinople, Rome and Alexandria are believed to have talismanic powers. While the marvelous aspects highlight the imperial connotations of these cities, they also make it more attractive as a target for conquest. However, an interesting aspect of *Dürr-i Meknun* rises from depiction of *âyine-i cihânnüma* in Constantinople, which is in fact belongs to Alexandria.<sup>113</sup> In this connotation, putting the *'aja'ib* and *ghara'ib* in the panorama of “distant” and fantastic places which are mostly invisible for the readers and even for the writer himself, reminds the modern reader the orientalist reflections and the position of “the other” in contrast to the self.<sup>114</sup> For example, in *Dürr-i Meknun*, the narrator, on one hand, delineates jinns and demons with peculiarities of oddity, on the other hand, he also attributes bizarre features to the denizens of “unreachable” islands. As for the jinns and demons, the narrator asserts that once upon a time they pervaded the earth yet when Adam was sent to the Earth, they were banished to these distant islands whose names are not mentioned in the text.<sup>115</sup> About the inhabitants of the islands located in *Bahr-i Muhit* (“The Encircling Sea”), the narrator likens them to animals who are lack of religion, and underlines their “barbaric” features. Apart from human beings, these islands are also presented as a plethora of wondrous creations ranging from precious stones to strange animals like elephants, monkeys, dragons and sea monsters.<sup>116</sup> A well-known motif of Waq Waq tree which bears fruit in the shape of human faces and sounds “waq waq” as the wind blows among them finds its place in *Dürr-i Meknun*.<sup>117</sup> The narrator of the text indicates that this tree is endemic to the Island of Waq Waq which is a common image in the works of the medieval Islamic cosmology.

Thus, being a synthetic work, *Dürr-i Meknun* functions as a book of late medieval lore. Especially the entries in the section about herbs and fruits have a textual

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<sup>113</sup> *Dürr-i Meknun*, p. 72.

<sup>114</sup> On this subject, see Stephen Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions: The Wonder of The New World*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991.

<sup>115</sup> *Dürr-i Meknun*, p. 44.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 63-64.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 63.

resemblance with the pharmaceutical manuscripts. Unlike the entires in Qazwini's *'Aja'ib al-Makhlukat*, which begins with a physical description of the plant, Ahmed Bican maps out the pharmaceutical features first.<sup>118</sup> Even though the herbs and fruits mentioned in the section have different properties, they point to the wonder at God's creations.<sup>119</sup> Despite the generic title of the section, Ahmed Bican implies that all of the plants in the earth have distinct characteristics and God has created most of them particularly for humans.<sup>120</sup> Hence, it becomes another way to express the same essential truth: God's oneness and ultimate power.

However, a glance at the titles of other chapters illustrates that there is a rupture in the organizational scheme as some of them kept for certain stories. Ahmed Bican cosmological framework combines geographic themes with prophetic ones, and instead of concluding with "inferior" creatures of wonder such as insects and vermin, it ends with the discussion on the Last Days and the Antichrist, *Dajjal*. The cosmographic hierarchy of creation merges with a perspective of historical time which finalizes with ultimate chaos. Indeed, cosmology is fundamental for the mystic as it demonstrates the unchangeable laws of God and invites the readers to follow the speculations related to the End within the same text.

The ruptures in the narrative emerge with the ninth and the tenth chapters on Solomon, as their titles indicate. However, the fifteenth chapter is also related to Solomon though its title is "The tale of legendary bird Simurg". These *'aja'ib* stories disrupt the order of the cosmos, yet this kind of disruptions is not merely peculiar to Ahmed Bican's work as it is datable to the 14<sup>th</sup> century. In the diverse artistic and sociopolitical landscape of the Ilkhanid period, various versions of Qazwini's text were created. The emphasis on the amazing stories and the narrative images increased yet these changes did not emerge with linear regularity. The increased participation of the

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<sup>118</sup> "Zencebil: Taamı hazmeyler, mideyi kızdırır. Süddeye, cimâya, rutubete ve yellere nâfi'dir. Dârçini: Mideye, öksürüğe, nezleye, böbreğe, ciğere, süddeye, istiskaya cimâya nâfi'dir. [...] Fevkal karası: A'zâya kuvvet verir. İki dirhemi adamı ishal eyler. Göze ağrısına iyidir." *Dürr-i Meknun*, p. 99.

<sup>119</sup> "Hak sübhanehu ve te'alâ hazretleri kulları için otları yarattı. Her birinden bir derde devâ, bir maraza şifâ için Lokman Hekim'e bildirdi ve hâl diliyle söyledi. Her ot ben filân derde devâyım dedi. Ol dahi halka bildirdi. Bilgil ki Hak te'alâ hazretleri dünyada bin ot yarattı. Her birine bir hâsiyyet verdi." p. 97.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

Turko-Mongol political class in the cultural life of the eastern Islamic lands correlated with this shift. It is mainly due to the fact that the conquered intellectual elite who had a profound interest in wonders-of-creation manuscripts, interpreted the Mongol Conquest as an inversion of the world order.<sup>121</sup>

These changes in the wonders-of-creation manuscripts can be obviously seen in through the ruptures in *Dürr-i Meknun*. Apart from the aforementioned sociopolitical context of the Ilkhanid period which affected the wonders-of-creation manuscripts especially within 14<sup>th</sup> century, I would add the impact of apocalyptic concerns on these ruptures. The ruptures emerging through ‘*aja’ib* stories of Solomon become meaningful within the discourse of apocalyptic concerns in *Dürr-i Meknun*. Solomon who was revered as the embodiment of ideal ruler, reigned not only over the humans, but also animals, jinns and demons.<sup>122</sup> Hence, the world over which Solomon reigned is akin to the cosmic order depicted in the text. Even though the last episode of *Dürr-i Meknun* concludes with the ultimate chaos, it does not have a pessimistic tone for the Ottomans, -which will be discussed in detail in the last chapter- rather it salutes the realization of prophecies which will bring about a new order leading by an Ottoman sultan. Although the author does not explicitly give the name of Mehmed II, his name can be easily seen between the lines through the implications. Therefore, these stories portraying Solomon as the ideal ruler, foreshadows a new leader who will don an important role in the final tribulations.

### 2.3. Legends on Constantinople

For Yerasimos, the legendary literature on Constantinople that was posited in the works of dervish camps uncovers the embedded concerns related to the centralist and imperial project of Mehmed II.<sup>123</sup> Yerasimos is right to call attention to the anxiety felt by some dervish groups as seen in Aşıkpaşazade’s account. But when it comes to whether or not there is any link between these concerns and legendary literature, it is

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<sup>121</sup> Persis Berlekamp in *Wonder, Image and Cosmos in Medieval Islam*. p. 59.

<sup>122</sup> “Pes acâibden biri Süleyman hazretinin tahtı ve hükmüdür kim cümle eşyaya hükmeyledi. Hak te’alâ hazretleri Süleyman peygambere bir saltanat i’tâ kılmıştır hiç kimseye verilmedi. Hak te’alâ hazretinin emriyle Cebrâil ana uçmakdan hâtem getirmişdir. Çün hâtem Süleyman’a değdi, cümle âlem halkı insan ve hayvan ve cinni ve dev ve peri hatta yel, vuhuş ve tuyur ve mâr ve mûr ana musahhar oldu.” *Dürr-i Meknun*, p. 82.

<sup>123</sup> Stefanos Yerasimos, *Kostantiniye ve Ayasofya Efsaneleri*, trans. by Şirin Tekeli, İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 1993. p. 86-88.

crucially important to abstain from analyzing pre-modern texts through our modern lenses. Such a direct correlation between the literary traditions and political ideology is not always facile to make as different dimensions should be considered in the panorama of late medieval world.

To the best of my knowledge, the first Ottoman text comprising the legends on Constantinople is Yazıcıoğlu Ahmed Bican's *Dürr-i Meknun*. It is also the first work mentioning the legendary founder of the city Yanko bin Medyan.<sup>124</sup> Later comments on the city depicting it as a “cursed” and “ominous” place have been interpreted as the display of anti-imperial stance.<sup>125</sup>

Ahmed Bican's account on the legends of Constantinople were also elaborated in later works such as the anonymous text on Ottoman history<sup>126</sup> and Mustafa Ali's *Kühü'l Ahbar* which is an example of historiographical literature. As Fleischer illustrates, Ali saw his text “as a critical encyclopedia of historical knowledge, a vehicle for his own erudition that would benefit both the learned and those who were basically literate but not fully educated.”<sup>127</sup> His aim was to compose a coherent epitome of Islamic and Ottoman lore. He also mentions Yanko Bin Medyan as the real founder of the city.<sup>128</sup> Moreover, Ali accentuates Yanko's abnormal length of life.<sup>129</sup>

This historical tradition is not only confined to the historical works of the pre-modern era, as it is also available in the Travels of Evliya Çelebi, the most significant example of first person narratives. However, as the intellectual life of 17<sup>th</sup> century had

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<sup>124</sup> “Ol Şehri Yanko bin Medyan Bünyan etmiştir.” *Dürr-i Meknun*, p. 73.

<sup>125</sup> “Pes ol vakitden beri ol şehre niçe kerre belâ ve kazâ, kâh taûn ve zelzeleden harab olup virân olmuşdur. Ceng ü aşub dahi eksik olmaz. Nice yıllar harab yatıp içinde yurtcular ve ejderhalar vatan etmişdir.” *Ibid.*

<sup>126</sup> *Anonim Osmanlı Kroniği 1299-1512*, hazırlayan: Necdet Öztürk, İstanbul: Türk Dünyası Araştırmaları Vakfı, 2000. p. 86-113.

<sup>127</sup> Cornell H. Fleischer, *Bureaucrat and Intellectual in the Ottoman Empire*, p. 246.

<sup>128</sup> “Vakta ki şehir binası tamam oldu, ismi ‘Yanko’ konulup banisi şöhretiyle be-nam oldu. Ba‘deh etraf-ı şehirde, ya‘ni nevahi vü kurasında ca be-ca üç yüz altmış pare buruc-ı mu‘alla dahi yapıldı.” Mustafa Ali, *Kühü'l Ahbar*, Vol. II, p. 28.

<sup>129</sup> “Ve bi'l-cümle, Yanko ibn-i Madiyan ve ol kenisedeki ruhbanan, hiç olmazsa bari ikişer üçer yüz yıl mikdarı ‘ömr sürerlerdi. Hala ki yaşadukça dalaletleri artup, zu‘m-i fasidlerince dürlü dürlü mezhebler ve bid’atler peyda iderlerdi.” *Ibid.*, p. 30.

different dimensions than those of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, Evliya had much more things to say about Yanko, including his genealogy and specific time period.<sup>130</sup>

Seemingly then, these legends on Constantinople were not only in circulation during Mehmed II's reign, but they also had an important place in historiography, travel accounts, cosmographical and geographical works of the later periods. Since analyzing these later works through the political topos of anti-imperial attitude would be anachronistic, it is reasonable to claim that these traditions were not deliberately fabricated or instrumentalized to challenge the imperial project. The fact that these traditions of legends on Constantinople were still in extensive usage by the 17<sup>th</sup> century illustrates the strong roots of it permeated Ottoman intellectual milieu from an early period. Nevertheless, in order to understand the dynamics of the legendary tradition within the network of social and historical relations, a preliminary focus on its sociopolitical production is fundamental.

The legendary tradition on Constantinople was initially formed by Arab Muslim geographical and travel literature dating from 9<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> centuries. The triggering reason to collect geographical information about the known world was a very basic need of course, yet the administrative, military and religious purposes were the other impulses. Furthermore, the geographical determinism generated by the Qur'anic notion of the Muslim community of the center (*ummataŋ wasatan*) divided the world into seven climes just like the Greek geographical classification. In this division, most of the land of Islam pertained to the forth clime which was also the symbol of civilization, culture and prophecy, and it shared this zone with both ancient and contemporary nations such as the Byzantines.<sup>131</sup>

Constantinople has a unique place in the Arabic-Islamic medieval literature; on one hand, it is the embodiment of Byzantine imagination hailing the beginning of East Roman Christian Empire, on the other, it is the heir of Greco-Roman civilization. For the Arab Muslim authors, Constantinople was like no other place in the world as it was

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<sup>130</sup> “Üçüncü kurucu Madyan ođlu Yanko oldu ki Adem Safi'nin yeryüzüne inişinden sonra 4600 yılında padişah olup İstanbul'u kurdu.. Bunun krallığı, Büyük İskender'in doğumundan 430 sene öncedir. Büyük İskender'den Hz. Risalet'in doğumuna kadar 882 senedir. Madyan ođlu Yanko, Amalak ođullarındandır. İshak ođlu Ays Nebi'ye ulaşır. Bir rivayette Yanko, kısraktan doğduđu için Madyan ođlu Yanko derler. Yunan Batlamyusların ilkidir.” Evliya Çelebi Seyahatnamesi: İstanbul. Haz. Seyit Ali Kahraman, Yücel Dađlı. İstanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2011. p. 8.

<sup>131</sup> Nadia Maria El Cheikh, *Byzantium Viewed by The Arabs*, p. 139.

incomparable in importance. The perceptions of the Byzantine capital did not only reflect the physical presence, but also its literary and historical associations. These perceptions were transmitted through a certain gaze which did not present a total image of the city. What was represented is a set of fixed coordinates revolving around great churches, amazing palaces, wonderful fountains, various statues and talismans. This is why these representations of the urban environment depict Constantinople as a “place”, since the concept of “place” points out cultural symbols and social attributes whereas “space” referring to somewhere that is physically defined. Whether geographical or literary, every work reflects the subjective view of the author. However, of course, there is a shared mentality in the texts which shows the Arab Muslim attraction to the Byzantine capital. Magical talismans, structures and objects of the city symbolize the imperial image through the marvels of Constantinople, and also refer to the talismanic protection of it like the other antique cities. Such an imagination can be explained by the collective consciousness of the medieval Arab Muslim writers who experienced the survival of Constantinople from numerous Muslim attacks. The more unattainable the goal is, the more alluring it becomes, just as Lacan names in psychoanalytic terms: “object of desire”.

The corpus of Arabic-Islamic texts on Constantinople excludes the mundane depictions of the city, overlooking its social structure, streets and people. On the contrary, the literary tradition concentrates on a few static monuments which functioned as fixed coordinates. With an agenda to capture the city, focusing merely on some structures such as the Golden Gate, The Hippodrome, the imperial palace, and the column of Justinian, the cistern, the organ, and the horlogion etc., demonstrates the defining landmarks of Arab Muslim’s Constantinople.<sup>132</sup> The recurrent references to these monuments also find its place in *Dürr-i Meknun*.<sup>133</sup> This partial image of the city

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<sup>132</sup> Ibid., p. 142.

<sup>133</sup> “Kostantiniyye derler bir ulu şehirdir. Anın içinde acâib binalar ve tılsımlar var idi. Orda bir deyir vardır, ulu deyirdir. Anın yanında bir meydan var. Orda bir mil var, yapılu. Anın üzerine âyine-i cihânnüma var idi. Kaçan denizden şehre yağ gelse düşmanı bilirdi. Mağrib’den kopsa dahi anda görünürdü. Bir yapı daha var idi. Anın üzerinde bir tabıl var idi. Her kim gaibde kimsesi olsa gelir o tabıl bir kerre vururdu. Eğer gaib diri olsa da o tabıldan sadâ gelirdi. Ölü olsa bin kez vursalar âvâz gelmezdi. Dahi yekpâre taşdan bir mil var idi. Dört pâre tunçdan nesnenin üzerine kaldırıp koymuşlar. Üzerine türlü sûretler kende kılmışlar. Bu âleme enbiyâdan ve beylerden kimler geldi ve gelecekdir; bu memleketde hükmedecekdir, cifr ile malûm etmişler. Tarihlerini Süryani dilinde yazmışlardır. Dahi o milin dibinde bakırdan bir el etmişler idi, tılsım idi. [...] Dahi tunçdan üç dört yılan dikmişler. Birbirine sarışmış, üçü üç yerden baş çıkarmış, içi mücevvef. Onbeş arşın yükseklikte. Eydürler kim tılsımla ol yılanı bağlamışlardır. Anda yılan âdemi sokmaz,



replete with the marvels and wealth concludes with the apocalyptic dream of conquest. Considering the magical talismans and the utter destruction of the city as a precondition of last judgment, Yerasimos seconds his argument that this narration in *Dürr-i Mekkun* reflects Ahmed Bican's blatant reaction against the conquest of Constantinople by Mehmed II.<sup>134</sup> I would leave the discussion of apocalyptic theme woven around the conquest of Constantinople in the last chapter, yet as for the marvels attributed to the city, they can be interpreted as the means to motivate and legitimize the conquest, rather than being instrumentalized to gainsay it.

Indeed, the popular belief of magical powers attributed to the public statues of Constantinople was also widespread among the Byzantines. The Byzantine collection of texts – also known as *Patria* – maps out the monuments in the city through narrating the stories and myths of each one, and claims Apollonius to be the creator of Constantinople's talismans. Apollonius's reputation was so prevalent that in numerous Arabic-Islamic sources he was referred as *sahib al-tilasmat*, or the master of talismans, and various Arabic works on astrology, alchemy and magic have been wrongly attributed to him.<sup>135</sup>

For Mehmed II, information on Byzantium was crucial, as his imperial project designed as a continuation of Byzantine Empire. Hence, the part on Hagia Sophia which was considered as a symbol of imperial image in *Patria* was translated. He also symbolically and politically used the title of *Kayser-i Rum* ("Caesar of Rum") addressing the acquisition of Byzantine heritage with the conquest. Actually, for the Ottomans, the geography in which they ruled was "Rum", the lands of Rome. Likewise, the Ottomans referred to their sultans as *Sultan-i Rum*, a Persianized version of the Arabic *sultan al-rum*. According to Cemal Kafadar, "Rum" was not merely posited as a geographical appellation, yet it also functioned to demarcate the region from the rest of the Turkish and Islamic world. As he also clarifies: "Unlike 'Osmanlı', 'Rumi' was not a signifier forged by or for a state; it was not even a part of the official discursive grid of the Ottoman administration. Various place names, as used by the state and the public,

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soksa da kâr eylemez. Dahi anda niçe yerde tılsımlar vardır, kimse bilmez. Yer yer miller var; kimi yapılı kimi mücevvef." *Dürr-i Mekkun*, p. 72-73.

<sup>134</sup> Stefanos Yerasimos, *Kostantiniye ve Ayasofya Efsaneleri*, p. 100.

<sup>135</sup> Nadia Maria El Cheikh, *Byzantium Viewed by The Arabs*, p. 148.

had ‘Rum’ in them, but all of them were strictly localized and frozen. [...] As for ‘Rumi’, no land survey, tax register, or court document would use it as an operational category. Somewhat anachronistically and tongue in cheek, it can be said that ‘Rumi’ is a category shaped by the civil society.”<sup>136</sup>

Of course, Constantinople as the city of marvels, did not only prevail in the works of history, it was also an intriguing subject for travel writers. The travel accounts in general have been a neglected tradition. Ostensibly, the modern reader’s approach to these texts forms a presumption that they represent the idea of self-fashioning, both of the individual traveller and of the collectivity of home society from which he originates.”<sup>137</sup> However, this view dwelling on the portraits of exotic, marginal worlds as fearful zones is much more valid for the medieval and early-modern Western tradition of travel-writing which is generally reflected by the travels of a 13<sup>th</sup> century Venetian, Marco Polo (1254-1324). Unlike the compilers of cosmographies and encyclopedias, travel writers were much more interested in credibility which laid significant emphasis on eye-witness experience.<sup>138</sup> Moreover, merchants like Marco Polo orchestrated the theme of wonder through the nexus between supply and demand so as to popularize “exotic” commodities as valuable wealth.<sup>139</sup>

Ibn Battuta, the “Oriental” counterpart of Polo, was a 14<sup>th</sup> century *‘ālim* and traveler from Maghreb, and his travels from 1320s to the 1340s obviously parallel those of the illustrious Venetian. While Marco Polo’s text is silent about Constantinople on the grounds that “so many people know all about it”<sup>140</sup>, Ibn Battuta’s focalization of his account on the central monuments of the city is momentous:

“I can only describe its [Hagia Sophia’s] exterior, as for its interior I did not see it. It is called in their languages *Aya Sufiyya*, and is one of the greatest churches of the Greeks; around it is a wall which encircles it so

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<sup>136</sup> Cemal Kafadar, “A Rome of One’s Own: Reflections on Cultural Geography and Identity in the Lands of Rum” *Muqarnas*, 24, History and Ideology: Architectural Heritage of the Lands of Rum”, Brill, 2007. p. 12.

<sup>137</sup> Muzaffer Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Indo-Persian Travels in the Age of Discoveries 1400-1800*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007. p. 15.

<sup>138</sup> Lorraine Daston & Katharine Park, *Wonders and The Order of Nature 1150-1750*, p. 62-63.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 38.

<sup>140</sup> Marco Polo, *Travels of Marco Polo*, Westminster, MD, USA: Modern Library, 2001. p 289.

that it looks like a city in itself. Its gates are thirteen in number, and it has a sacred enclosure, which is about a mile long and closed by a great gate. No one is prevented from entering the enclosure, and in fact, I went into it with the king's father [...], it is like an audience hall, paved with marble and traversed by a water channel which issues from the church. At the door of the church there are porticoes where the attendants sit who sweep its paths, light its lamps and close its doors. They allow no person to enter it until he prostrates himself to the huge cross at their place, which they claim to be a relic of the wood on which the double of Jesus (on whom be peace) was crucified. This is over the door of the church, set in golden frame about ten cubits in height, across which they placed a similar golden frame so that it forms a cross. This door is covered with plaques of silver and gold, and its two rings are of pure gold."<sup>141</sup>

The depiction of the church can be considered as a symbol of the wealth of the city as there are copious references to Hagia Sophia's golden and silver plaques. Ibn Battuta's recollection of Constantinople can be summarized as the embodiment of tolerance, objectivity, and indeed wonder.<sup>142</sup> Leaving aside the discussions on whether he accrued his journey to Constantinople or not, it can be surely asserted that there is nothing extraordinary about a Muslim traveler whether as a merchant or an envoy visiting the city in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Considering the reading practices especially before the printing-press, claiming that the travel and historical accounts on Constantinople were admixed with wonder both for Western and Muslim readers is not an eccentric conclusion. This can be illustrated through travels of a fictitious hero, Sir John Mandeville, which bear affinities in context to contemporary texts like those of Marco Polo and Ibn Battuta. The account on Constantinople in the stories attributed to Mandeville, yet the authorship of which still remains unknown, is more or less akin to Ibn Battuta's narration:

"Constantinople is a beautiful city, and noble, triangular in shape, and securely walled; two sides are enclosed by the Hellespont, which most people now call Saint George's Arm, and others Buke, old Troy. [...] There are many wonders in Constantinople, and also many holy relics worthy of veneration, and above all the most precious Cross of Christ, or the greater part of it, as well as the seamless tunic, with the sponge and the reed, and one of the nails, and half of the Crown of Thorns, whose other half was taken to the King of France's Chapel in Paris. [...] The Church in Constantinople is said to be dedicated in honor of Sancta

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<sup>141</sup> *The Travels of Ibn Battutah*, abridged, introduced and annotated by Tim Mackintosh-Smith, Basingtoke and Oxford: Picador, 2002. p. 133.

<sup>142</sup> Ross E. Dunn, *The Adventures of Ibn Battuta: a Muslim Traveler of the Fourteenth Century*, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University Of California Press, 2012. p. 172.

Sophia (that is, God's ineffable wisdom) and the noblest of all the world's churches, as much for the building's skillful design as for preserving holy Relics. [...] For there is there, along with relics of this sort, a large vessel, Enhydros, as if of marble from Petra, continuously exuding water from itself; once a year it is found full of its exuded liquid. In front of this church, on a marble column, there is a large statue, cast in gilded bronze, of the former Emperor Justinian sitting on a horse; there was moreover originally a round, forged sphere in the statue's hand that long ago now fell out of its hand, as a sign that the emperor had lost the lordship of many lands."<sup>143</sup>

Later historical accounts penned after *Dürr-i Meknun* focused on the very same monuments, depicting in a similar style. For example, Ibn Kemal's description of the city presents ahistorical view and dwells on wondrous ("*acîb u garîb*") monuments, mainly Hagia Sophia.<sup>144</sup> Also, Mustafa Ali comments on the special features of Hagia Sophia's marbles and gates, indicating that they were specially collected from various geographical places, and sets his narration in a historical context.<sup>145</sup> This legendary tradition continued to exist in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The most celebrated of the Ottoman travelers, Evliya Çelebi refers to legends of Constantinople on a broader plane annexing a spurious genealogy for Yanko bin Medyan. Thus, considering the fact that these legendary accounts were still in circulation even after the conquest of Constantinople, it is anachronistic to aver that they were used to repudiate the imperial project. Legends particularly about politically, economically and religiously important cities like Constantinople occupy a significant place in both travel accounts and histories.<sup>146</sup> The legendary discourse on Constantinople was not strictly diachronic, yet for the Ottoman case, the image of the city formed an anachronistic exaltation as it originally burgeoned in the Muslim Arabic tradition. The corpus of grandeur and glory revolving around the conquest of Constantinople by the Muslim Arabs lost its importance since this ultimate goal was realized by an Ottoman Sultan. In fact, on the eve of 15<sup>th</sup> century, the strategic

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<sup>143</sup> Iain Macleod Higgins (Translated by). *Book of John Mandeville : With Related Texts*. Indianapolis, IN, USA: Hackett Publishing Co., 2011. p. 208- 209.

<sup>144</sup> "Bir Şeddâdî kubbedür zâtü'l-'imâd, 'âlem-i harâb-âbâdda nazîrin çeşm-i ahvâl görmüş ancak; beyânında "sâminu seb'un şidâd" dinse gören istib'âd itmez. [...] Taraf taraf tak-ı hilâl-kamer misâli turfe turfe nîm-kubbeler çatılmış, biri biri üstünde nitak-ı kavs-ı kuzeh gibi dürlü dürlü kemerler atılmış; cümle'nün üstünde bir tak-ı 'âlî, eyvân-ı felekü'l-eflâk misali. [...] Dîvârının pür-nakş-ı nigâr-zârî mînây-ı mütellâ, ferş-i sîm-sîmasınun her mermeri bir mirât-ı mücellâ." Ibn Kemal, *Tevarih-i Al-i Osman*, Vol. VII, p. 78-79.

<sup>145</sup> Mustafa Ali, *Kühü'l Ahbar*, Vol. II, p. 33-36.

<sup>146</sup> For example, in *Dürr-i Meknun*, Ahmed Bican tells that there are many wonders in Egypt, and sea monsters in the sea of Serendib. p. 71.

significance of the capture of Constantinople for Arab Muslims had already waned due to geographical restrictions set by the Ottoman lands. Also for the Ottomans, the conquest was not a strategic must, as it was possible to rule the adjacent lands without much interference. Nonetheless, owing to the existence of Constantinople in a form of a city-state, it posed a challenge to the territorial unity of the Ottoman lands. In other words, the greatest meaning of the conquest had a symbolic effect for a Muslim sultan. Yet, it did not take long time to revive the prophecies of the “coming” last day intermingled with the conquest not only in Islamic eschatological tradition, but also in Byzantine apocalyptic corpus.

## CHAPTER III

### REFLECTIONS OF APOCALYPTIC TRADITION IN *DÜRR-İ MEKNUN*

#### 3.1. Theoretical Background of Concept of Apocalypse

Being one of the most recurring discourses, “The End” or, “Apocalypse”, stimulates human mind to draw a parallel between the current time and the future of the world, as D. H. Lawrence remarks, “What does Apocalypse matter, unless in so far as it gives us imaginative release into another imaginative world? Understanding or studying apocalypse can lead an individual to a rediscovery of energy to perceive his relation to cosmos.”<sup>147</sup> On the other hand, Frank Kermode associates the imaginative and the historical variant of apocalypse with the notion of crisis. According to him, crisis is an excitative factor to perceive the world and time holistically, therefore it functions as a bridge that ties the past to the future of people.<sup>148</sup>

The etymological definition of “apocalypse” by Oxford English Dictionary indicates that the term derives from the Greek *apokalupsis*, which embodies uncovering / revealing.<sup>149</sup> Obviously, this definition clarifies that the term intrinsically hinges on a phenomenon that has not occurred yet, therefore, it has prophetic connotations. As James Aho opines, there is an oxymoronic meaning hidden in the structure of the word since *apo* signifies reversal and *kalyptein* means “to uncover”, the definition represents a beginning at the point of an end.<sup>150</sup> To wit, while the term is replete with pessimistic

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<sup>147</sup> Qtd. by David Seed (ed.), in *Imagining Apocalypse: Studies in Cultural Crisis*, London: Macmillan, 2000, p. 1.

<sup>148</sup> Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in The Theory of Fiction*, New York: Oxford UP, 1967, p. 94-95.

<sup>149</sup> *OED* online.

<sup>150</sup> James A. Aho, “The Apocalypse of Modernity” in *Millennium, Messiahs, and Mayhem*:

reflections of destruction, it is also imbued with optimistic views in its relationship to rebirth.

Yet of course, apocalypse is a much more complicated term than this. Owing to the fact that it is centuries-old, deep-rooted albeit not static, always a fresh subject – consider the discussions on global warming in current media-, the term has obtained various associations from different fields of study ranging from history to economics, which consequently led to its being an eclectic concept. Despite this, divisions among the modes of apocalypse have been made in order to unravel its multilayered dimensions. For example, according to Lee Quinby, there are three main parts of the apocalypse. Firstly, “divine apocalypse” is “the discourse of religious fundamentalists who see divine design and judgment as that which will bring on the end of the world and provide a heavenly home for an elect group.”<sup>151</sup> The second one is “technological apocalypse” which is divided into two segments: technological devastation stemming from nuclear crisis or mechanized dehumanization, and technological salvation. The last one is “ironic apocalypse” which is “expressed through absurdist or nihilistic descriptions of existence” and claims that even though there is an end to time, there will be no rebirth. The divine apocalypse, which is the main focus of this study, is in sharp distinction from the ironic apocalypse: the believers of divine apocalypse function as agents in bringing about the end of life, as they also believe in salvation, whereas the believers of the latter are in total apathy.<sup>152</sup>

Another term that should be underlined is “apocalypticism”. As a form of eschatology, apocalypticism revolves around the idea which evaluates historical events from the perspective of final events. Therefore, it is also referred as “apocalyptic eschatology”. Based on a deterministic perspective, apocalyptic eschatology follows the path of the linear model of history. Due to the fact that redemption depends upon historical events, apocalypticism has a “historicist” tone. David Bromley also illustrates that apocalypticism is imbued with concepts such as doomsday, utopianism and millennialism which reflect its relationship with theology. In fact, apocalypticism is

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Contemporary Apocalyptic Movements. Ed. by Thomas Robbins and Susan J. Palmer. London: Routledge, 1997. pp. 61-72. p. 65.

<sup>151</sup> Lee Quinby, *Anti-Apocalypse: Exercises in Genealogical Criticism*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994. p. xv.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xxi.

engrained in crisis moments. Therefore, it embodies the desire apropos to an imminent new order.<sup>153</sup> In a nutshell then, apocalypticism imbued with the vision of doomsday is radically innovative in claiming a novel world system.

### **3.2. The Conquest of Constantinople in Apocalyptic Traditions**

The apocalyptic speculations related to the conquest of Constantinople emerge within the works of Stéphane Yerasimos and Feridun Emecen. In *Légendes d'empire*, Yerasimos demonstrates the intertextuality of apocalyptic traditions within Byzantine and Islamic contexts. However, he mentions so many texts that are related to apocalypticism in the Ottoman circle that he does not analyze each of them comprehensively. Briefly, he concludes that Ottoman apocalypticism on the conquest of Constantinople functioned as a resistance to the centralization of political power. For Emecen, these apocalyptic narrations function as a criticism towards the reforms set by Mehmed II.<sup>154</sup> The arguments of these two respectable historians have been generally taken for granted in the studies of Ottoman apocalypticism. One vein of their argument rests on the assumption that theme of wonders in Constantinople points out the political dissent against the imperial project, which has been discussed in the previous chapter. The other one is about the bulk of apocalyptic tones woven around the conquest of the city. But, what are the origins of this apocalyptic tradition?

Actually, the conquest of Constantinople has been associated with the proximity of the End Time/ the Last Hour for Christians, Jews and Muslims. Especially in the history of the Byzantine Empire, apocalypticism has a great impact as it associates the end of the empire with the end of the world. As Dorothy de F. Abrahamse puts it, “one important contribution of early studies of the legends of the Last Roman Emperor was the discovery that the idea was neither developed from general oral tradition nor taken directly from biblical themes, but came to the West from pseudonymous prophecies circulating in the Byzantine world.”<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>153</sup> David G. Bromley, “Constructing Apocalypticism: Social and Cultural Elements of Radical Organization” in *Millennium, Messiahs, and Mayhem: Contemporary Apocalyptic Movements*. Ed. by Thomas Robbins and Susan J. Palmer. London: Routledge, 1997. pp. 31-45. p. 32-33.

<sup>154</sup> Feridun Emecen, *Fetih ve Kıyamet*. İstanbul: Timaş Yayınları, 2012. p. 38.

<sup>155</sup> Paul Alexander, *The Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition*, ed. with introduction by Dorothy de F. Abrahamse, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985, p. 2.



Certainly, the political, economic and military problems during the last centuries of Byzantium gave way to the urgency of apocalypticism. To illustrate, in a manuscript attributed to St. John Chrysostom, but, which in fact, was composed in a much later age, it is said that “God, because of the sinfulness of Christians, will call in the Ishmaelites, who then will enter the City of the Seven Hills (Constantinople) with arms and horses, shed much blood, carry off large amounts of booty” (Alexander, 1984: 72). Furthermore, the limitation of the physical boundaries of the empire to a small area around Constantinople consolidated the apocalyptic feature of the city. It should also be noted that when Constantinople was conquered in 1453, it was just thirty-nine years prior to the final year of Creation (the seven-thousandth year) according to the Byzantine tradition.

The impact of the shock due to the conquest of Constantinople by Sultan Mehmed on the Christian world is not difficult to consider. This “disaster” was largely reported and lamented even after many years. First perceived in prophetic terms, the conquest gradually developed a folklore trying to understand “the alteration of their world and promised themselves, through prophetic pronouncements, that the Greeks would eventually rise again to defeat Turks and reinstate their state.”<sup>156</sup> Actually, the depiction of the Turks as “barbarians” by the humanist scholars gained a much stronger and unified rhetoric with the fall of Constantinople. This image was consolidated by the devastation of thousands books during the siege -even though the extent of the destruction is full of qualms owing to Mehmed II’s bibliophilic character-, and the myth of the sultan’s rape of royal maiden –or boy as in Doukas’s chronicle-, and attracted the attention of humanists. On the other hand, many historical works of Renaissance Europe discussed the supposed Trojan origins of the Turks. While the identification of the Turks with the Trojans reflects an attempt to integrate them into Western cultural tradition, the portrait of the Turks as the “inhuman” other shows its function in order to legitimize the expectations of political camp which consisted of advocates of crusade in the later 15<sup>th</sup> century. The belief in “barbarian tradition” into which the Turks were also added, was indeed the humanist vein of Western millenarianism, yet in practice, the Turks were frequently associated with more traditional variants of chiliastic speculation as well.<sup>157</sup> Linking the Turks with Scythians or Trojans was just a dimension of Western

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<sup>156</sup> Nadia Maria El Cheikh, *Byzantium Viewed by The Arabs*, p. 215.

<sup>157</sup> James Hankins, “Renaissance Crusaders: Humanist Crusade Literature in Age of Mehmed II”,

chiliasm as other ways such as integrating these peoples into the biblical peoples of Gog and Magog or the Ishmaelites were also widespread already in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, even before the humanists appeared on the scene. However, some humanists were not late to adopt the millenarian discourse to their writings. For example, the humanist pope Nicholas V called Mehmed II, the Second Muhammed, identifying him with the “beast of apocalypse”. Likewise, Isidore of Kiev proclaimed that he was the precursor of Antichrist. George Trebizond, as one of the humanist millenarians, announced that henceforth Mehmed II would be called as Manuel since he would be a Christian ruler of justice under whom peoples would be united.<sup>158</sup>

Soon after the conquest, the view that the Greeks had already deserved their fate due to their avarice and idleness became popular. Considering the characteristics of a culture that thought everything happened at the nod of the God, it is natural in this context to seek for the scapegoats upon whom blame for divine punishment could be laid.<sup>159</sup> Nestor-Iskender, though not declaring a direct historical or genealogical linkage between the Trojans and the Turks, believed that the Turks were the instruments of fate, as they had been sent to punish the Greeks for injustices done at Troy.<sup>160</sup> Under the influence of apocalyptic popular themes of the period, he claimed that the plight of the people of Constantinople was realized for their sins: “the city became depressed and humbled itself to evil – at times through the invasions of the unbelievers; at times to hunger and in part plagues, and at times through struggles amongst [the inhabitants] themselves, by which the powerful became weak and the people were impoverished.”<sup>161</sup> Writing several decades after the conquest, the Greek historian Laonicus Chalcocondyles also said that the loss was a punishment that the Greeks deserved, as an outcome of their brutal attack on ancient Troy.<sup>162</sup> In fact, the sentiment that the Greeks deserved the punishment at the hands of the Turks emerged even before the fall of

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*Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, Vol. 49, Symposium on Byzantium and the Italians, 13th – 15th Centuries, 1995, pp. 111-207. p. 142.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid., p. 132.

<sup>160</sup> Margaret Meserve, *Empires of Islam in Renaissance Historical Thought*, p. 33.

<sup>161</sup> Nestor-Iskander, *The Tale of Constantinople (Of Its Origin and Capture by the Turks in the Year 1453)*, p. 81.

<sup>162</sup> Margaret Meserve, *Empires of Islam in Renaissance Historical Thought*, p. 33.

Constantinople. However, blaming the Greeks for their own catastrophe functioned as the avoidance of responsibility. Furthermore, it was also posited as an “isolationist ploy to sap crusading zeal” while not publicly rejecting against the crusading projects.<sup>163</sup>

About the beginning of the 1460s, a novel type of apocalyptic speculations in European tradition based upon Byzantine apocalypticism emerged, and a prophecy celebrating a Christian victory over the Turks was produced:

“[It] was allegedly transmitted to the pope by the king of France, Charles VII or Louis XI. The prophecy had, to be sure, an adequately gloomy beginning. The pope would die in 1466, there would be famine in 1467, and all the clergy would perish in 1468. The Turk would put Christendom under siege from Rhodes to Rome in 1469, but the king of France would break the siege of Rome (at the Porta Latina), and force the Turk into flight as far as the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem. The Turk in fact would be utterly defeated in 1470, and a hermit elected pope, under whom the Christian world would finally be united in 1471. And, having obviously done his part, the king of France was to die the following year.”<sup>164</sup>

As for the Muslim apocalyptic tradition, it can be asserted that its roots date back to rise of Islam in the 7<sup>th</sup> century. Since the Muslim and non-Muslim communities shared similar experiences under a unique political umbrella in the world of late antiquity, their expectations and visions had also close similarities. An interaction that lasted nearly for two centuries had a significant impact on the embodiment of ideas during the early Abbasid period, and this consequently led the observers to perceive new political developments through a messianic or apocalyptic insight. That is why, the response of Jewish, Zoroastrian and Christian communities to the rise of Islam was apocalyptic.<sup>165</sup> For the believers of the monotheistic faith systems, the birth of Islam was a response to their expectations, yet soon what they experienced was a total frustration as Islam did not perfectly fit the locus of traditional prophecies.<sup>166</sup>

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<sup>163</sup> James Hankins, “Renaissance Crusaders: Humanist Crusade Literature in Age of Mehmed II”, p. 132-133.

<sup>164</sup> Kenneth Setton, *Western Hostility to Islam and Prophecies of Turkish Doom*, Philadelphia, PA: American Philosophical Society, 1992. p. 10-11.

<sup>165</sup> Hayrettin Yücesoy, *Messianic Beliefs and Imperial Politics in Medieval Islam. The 'Abbasid Caliphate in the Early Ninth Century*, Columbia, SC: The University of California Press, 2009. p. 28.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1.

Islam is imbued with the theme of the nearness of the End underlined by the belief that Muhammed is the last prophet. Although Qur'an can be called as an eschatological book, it does not comment on the specific time of the Last Hour due to the belief that it is known solely by God. However, the corpus of *hadith* collections somehow diluted this "ambiguity" for the believers as they included chronological approximations.

Islamic apocalypticism borrowed numerous themes from Christian tradition and it was actually under the influence of the Book of Daniel. Nevertheless, a concise analysis of the confluences of the Book of Daniel at the birth of Islam has been overlooked which may stem from the fact that Qur'an does not mention Daniel.<sup>167</sup> The impact of the Danielic idea of setting the seal on prophecy is obviously seen through Muhammad's notion of final prophecy.<sup>168</sup> Also, it can be asserted that the Muslim apocalyptic tradition includes Jewish and Christian elements yet this does not necessarily mean that it lacks originality: "it is a development from classical themes, some of which were grafted onto the tradition, while others were rejected."<sup>169</sup> In fact, the time in which Islam emerged was one of the apocalyptic expectations on the part of all of the religious groups in the Middle East as a result of a long struggle between the Byzantine Empire and the Persian Sasanian Empire. This political background integrated with a set of common characteristics between Islam and Christianity especially during the 1<sup>st</sup>/7<sup>th</sup> century, made it possible for the first Christians to convert to Islam just because of their familiar apocalyptic beliefs.<sup>170</sup>

In fact, the apocalyptic tradition discussed here combines the Jewish, Christian and Muslim elements and revolves around two equal and opposite tendencies:

"[A]n apologetic defeatist tendency concurrent with a triumphalist imperialist one. The imperialist tendency is strong in Muslim apocalyptic, along with a desire to denigrate and humiliate Christianity

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<sup>167</sup> Said Amir Arjomand, "Messianism, Millennialism and Revolution in Early Islamic History", in *Imagining the End: Visions of Apocalypse from the Ancient Middle East to Modern America*, Ed. by Abbas Amanat and Magnus Bernhardsson, New York: I. B. Tauris Publishers, 2002. pp. 106-125. p.108.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid., p. 109.

<sup>169</sup> David Cook, *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic*, Princeton: The Darwin Press, Inc., 2002. p. 2.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid., p. 3-4.

(especially), and to use the worldly success of the new faith for polemical purposes. We find that the Christian response to this usually does not reject the Muslim successes; instead, it attributes them to the righteous wrath of God against the Christians themselves for their own misdeeds. This approach protected them from the full force of Muslim polemic by ascribing the source of the defeats to another cause.”<sup>171</sup>

Thus, such seemingly opposing tendencies possess direct motives for one another. For example, on the fall of Constantinople, the Christian apocalyptic expectations coincide with those of the Muslims, and function as the mirror images. While the Christian apocalyptists made usage of the fear generated by the Muslim’s successes to impose their own belief system on their society, they also strengthened the main linchpins of Muslim apocalypse about the fall of Constantinople.<sup>172</sup>

Indeed, there are two common tropes that can be seen both in Byzantine and Islamic apocalypticism: Constantinople and the Blond People (*Banu al-Asfar*). From this perspective, the Muslim conquest of Constantinople was accepted as a precursor of the End. However, the Muslims would temporarily rule the city as it would be regained by the counter-attack of the Blond Peoples. Accordingly, Muslims would go back to Syria, and only after the descent of the Messiah would they eventually conquer the city.

In the Islamic context, *Banu al-Asfar* refers to the Byzantines as Arab Muslims persisted in finding “the origins of the *Rum* back to Abraham and in attempting to explain the common reference” through *Banu al-Asfar*.<sup>173</sup> This reference to Byzantines as *Banu al-Asfar* also emerges in the hadith as “in the Hadith mention is made of the contest of the Arabs with the Banu 'l-Asfar and the conquest of their capital Constantinople. Later, this designation was applied to Europeans in general, especially in Spain.”<sup>174</sup>

In the Byzantine/European tradition, it is predicted that “the victorious emperor will tame the Blond Beards (Peoples?), will expel the Arabs, and will thus fulfill a prophecy: 'Dog and whelp together will pursue the field'. The emperor will proceed to Rome via 'Longobardia'. From there he will march to the City of the Seven Hills

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<sup>171</sup> Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>173</sup> Nadia Maria El Cheikh, *Byzantium Viewed by The Arabs*, p. 192.

<sup>174</sup> See, *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, “Asfar”.

(Constantinople), destroy several rivals, and enter the city. He will rule peacefully for thirty-two years.”<sup>175</sup>

On the other hand, the Arabs were afraid of being pushed back into the deserts by the Byzantines. Such a concern was also reflected through their literary expression in which the polarity between “*manabit al-gamh* (the places where wheat grows) or *manabit al-za'faran* (referring to saffron) versus *manabit al-shih* (growing places of wormwood, a typical desert plant).”<sup>176</sup> To wit, the Arabs “were painfully aware of the immense difference between the lands from which they had come, and the lands that they now occupied.”<sup>177</sup>

The Ottomans also applied these apocalyptic traditions. Especially, Ottoman scholars, dervishes, historians and political figures of the 15<sup>th</sup> century already knew what the conquest of Constantinople symbolized was more than a military success. Nevertheless, in the military council before the siege, some participants showed their objections against the conquest of the city and hinged their oppositions on the apocalyptic symbols. One pivotal figure among them was Çandarlı who explicitly rejected the conquest.<sup>178</sup> On the other hand, Akşemsetdin, who was Mehmed II's tutor and advisor attempted to alleviate the concerns related to the conquest. He claimed that he interpreted the Quran and concluded that the Ottoman conquest would be a great achievement: “Now, an unusual thing occurred to me while I was sitting in grief; I opened the Qur'an to see what is going to happen to us (*tefe'ül*). This is what we found upon the guidance of Dja'for Sadik.”<sup>179</sup> Furthermore, Akşemsetdin, who was also a saint of Bayramiyya, tried to discover the tomb of Abu Ayyub al-Ansari according to

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<sup>175</sup> Paul Alexander, *The Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition*, ed. By Dorothy de F. Abrahamse, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985. p. 63.

<sup>176</sup> David Cook, *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic*, p. 72.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid.

<sup>178</sup> “Çandarlı, son ana kadar daima İstanbul'un fethi teşebbüsüne muhalif kalacaktır. Teşebbüs muvaffak olursa kendisinin, yahut hiç değilse otoriterisinin mahvı, muvaffak olamazsa devletin tehlikeye düşmesi muhakkak görünüyordu. Hatta o, şehir fetholunsa dahi korkunç bir Haçlı seferi silsilesini tahrik edeceğini ve Osmanlı devletinin mahvına sebep olabileceğini ileri sürecektir.” Halil İnalçık, *Fatih Devri Üzerinde Tetkikler ve Vesikalar*, Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, 1995, p. 124.

<sup>179</sup> Akşemsetdin's letter to sultan Mehmed II, trans. by Halil İnalçık in *The Survey of Istanbul: 1455*, p. 592.

divinatory means.<sup>180</sup> Such an attempt to find the tomb of Abu Ayyub al-Ansari, who had been one of Muhammad's earliest supporters and died during the siege of Constantinople, reflects the desire to set a link between the early Muslims and the Ottoman army. This tradition which hinges on the symbolic possession of the city is also explicit in Ibn al-Athir and al-Dimashqi's texts mentioning the tomb of Abu Ayyub. Qazwini, in his geographical dictionary, *Athar*, portrays this tomb as being by the walls of Constantinople and tells that "its soil is venerated by the Byzantines, who go there to pray for rain during times of drought."<sup>181</sup> Mustafa Ali, in his *Künhü'l Ahbar*, also describes Abu Ayyub's tomb.<sup>182</sup> In fact, the Ayyub foundation was built before Mehmed II's move to the city and due to its association with the prophet and his armies, and it was aimed to legitimize the decision to inhabit the city.<sup>183</sup>

The usage of the hadith which is related to the conquest so as to underline the celebration of it in advance was not merely peculiar to the Ottomans. As Koray Durak elucidates, hadith and apocalyptic literature "fully developed after the period of failed attempts to conquer Constantinople, reflect very well the aspirations and disillusionments of the early Islamic conquerors, and the process of postponing the capture of Constantinople to a distant future."<sup>184</sup> Actually, some scholars have thought that the hadith ("Constantinople shall be conquered indeed; what a wonderful leader will that leader be, and what a wonderful army will that army be") is an Ottoman fabrication as the extensively used hadith collections do not mention it. Nevertheless, it should be also noted that, whereas this hadith cannot be seen in the hadith collections by al-Bukhari and Muslim, in his *Müsned*, Ahmad ibn Hanbal (d. AH 241/CE 855) gives

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<sup>180</sup> See, *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, "Ak Shams Al-Din".

<sup>181</sup> Nadia Maria El Cheikh, *Byzantium Viewed by The Arabs*, p.210.

<sup>182</sup> "Ba'zılar kavlince Hazret-i Ebi-Eyyub'un mezarı, ol iki sur arasında vaki'dür. Ve yine 'inde'l-ba'z, ol mahalldeki merkad, hazret-i Ebu Eyyub'un karındaşı türbesi diyü şayi'dür. Lakin ba'zı 'alametler belürmesi ve ol ab-ı lezizün eseri yogıken peyda olması dahı sonra mübarek başları ucunda bir serv-i mevzun bitmesi ve ol devha'-i bag-ı kerameti ima kılınması, dahı sonra başları ucunda Sultan Muhammed Han fethinde Akşemsüddin merhumun ta'yini mucebince esahhı şimdi ziyaretgah olan mahall-i şerifdür." Mustafa Ali, *Künhü'l-Ahbar*, p. 44.

<sup>183</sup> Kafesçioğlu, *Constantinopolis/Istanbul*, p. 46.

<sup>184</sup> Koray Durak, "Through an Eastern Window: Muslims in Constantinople and Constantinople in Early Islamic sources" in *From Byzantion To Istanbul: 8000 Years of A Capital*, Sabancı University Sakıp Sabancı Museum Catalog, 2010. p. 103.

place to it.<sup>185</sup> Understandably, after the conquest, the Ottoman letters that were sent to Muslim rulers do not involve the hadiths on Constantinople with apocalyptic connotations; those that do not refer to apocalyptic aspect were cited.<sup>186</sup>

However, Ahmed Bican chose to display the apocalyptic significances of the conquest. Indeed, he was already engaged in eschatology in his works penned before the conquest. Especially in his *Dürr-i Mekkun* which is a post-1453 work, he posited the history of the Ottoman enterprise within an apocalyptic view which he constructed through Byzantine and Islamic apocalyptic tradition.

### 3.3. *Dürr-i Mekkun* as An Apocalyptic Text

Before the textual analysis of *Dürr-i Mekkun* as an apocalyptic text, the historical background should be paid attention as Ahmed Bican lived in a difficult period for Ottoman lands.<sup>187</sup> The Battle of Ankara in 1402 led to interregnum during which Ottoman princes fought one another. Even when Mehmed I ascended the throne in 1413, the problems did not disappear. In his reign, Murad II (r. 1421-1444, 1446-1451) had to deal with two rebellions caused by Ottoman princes. Even though he was still in good health, Murad II abdicated in favor his son which mostly stems from his unsuccessful warfare with the Hungarians. Thus, the twelve-year-old sultan, Mehmed II became the ruler, yet he was not experienced enough to handle the recent problems: “A power struggle broke out between the grand vizier Çandarlı Halil and the sultan's tutors, Zaganos and the *beylerbeyi* of Rumelia, Şihabettin. A fire in Edirne destroyed thousands of homes, a combined Hungarian and Wallachian army crossed the Danube and marched through Bulgaria towards the Ottoman capital; a Venetian fleet closed the

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<sup>185</sup> Feridun M. Emecen, *Fetih ve Kıyamet*, p. 37.

<sup>186</sup> For these letters, see Ahmet Ateş, “İstanbul'un Fethine Dair Fatih Sultan Mehmed Tarafından Gönderilen Mektuplar ve Bunlara Gelen Cevaplar,” *Tarih Dergisi* 4, no.7, 1953. pp. 11-50. “Peygamber'in hadislerinden 'Tanrının sözü üstün olan söz olsun diye savaşan Tanrı yolu üzerindedir' ve 'bir kimsenin ayakları Tanrı yolunda toza bulanırsa, Tanrı onu cehennem ateşine haram eder' hadisleri, 'müminleri savaşa teşvik et' ayetinin manasına uygun olarak, insanı bu en güzel işlere teşvik etmektedir” p. 36-37.; “Şimdi bu ülkelerde bulunan Konstantiniye şehrinin alamet ve delilleri öyle görünüyor ki, 'Onlar ganimetleri paylaşırken Konstantiniye feth edilecektir' [The Quran, VIII, suret el-Shu'ara] ile bundan başka 'Bir tarafı karada, bir tarafı denizde olan şehir duyduunuz mu? - Evet, ey Tanrı elçisi, denildi. Dedi – 70.000 kişilik bir ordu ona gaza yapacaktır...! [Ateş states that such a hadith does not exist] gibi Peygamber'in doğru hadislerinde açıkça geçen bu namı memleket ve sağlam kale olmalıdır” p. 38-39.

<sup>187</sup> See, Metin Kunt, “Siyasal Tarih (1300-1600)” in *Türkiye Tarihi 2: Osmanlı Devleti 1300-1600*, Sina Akşin (ed.), İstanbul: Cem Yayınevi, 2009. p.69-77.



Dardanelles.”<sup>188</sup> As a result, the former sultan was summoned to rule in such a crisis. Mehmed II ultimately became the ruler with the death of his father in 1451. He, in fact, “was the true founder of the Ottoman Empire” as İnalcık utters.<sup>189</sup>

On the other hand, in Ahmed Bican's time, a wider usage of Turkish vernacular and new reading practices emerged. Along with the translations from Arabic and Persian, an Anatolian *koine* originated in the 15<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>190</sup> The Yazıcıoğlu brothers, Ahmed and Mehmed, attempted to provide vernacular compendia for “the people of their land”, (*bu bizim ilin kavmi*), and therefore appointed themselves a mission, the outcome of which can be seen through their works penned before 1453.<sup>191</sup> Hence, they tried to construct “a bridge between the learning of the Islamic world as expressed in Arabic and Persian and the simple Turkish of the Ottoman readers” which also indicates that their targeted audience involved a considerable number of readers: “their fellow mystics, certain sections of the urban population and also, quite probably, new converts to Islam.”<sup>192</sup>

In this particular historical context, our focus should be also directed towards the religious movements and mentalities. The intellectual environment to which Ahmed Bican belonged supplied the milieu for the convergence of divination, prophecy and messianic movements. Parallel to this, Şeyh Bedreddin (d. 1416) and his followers launched a messianic religio-political movement which brought about a chaos in Western Anatolia and the Balkans.<sup>193</sup> In this connection, these ideas were not only peculiar to scholars and dervish groups, they also had an impact on the Ottoman sultan and his entourage. To illustrate, in *Halilname*, written by 'Abdülvasi Çelebi to be

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<sup>188</sup> Halil İnalcık, *The Ottoman Empire: The Classical Age, 1300-1600*. London: Phoenix, 1994. p. 20-21.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29.

<sup>190</sup> See Nuri Yüce “Osmanlı Türkçesi” in *Osmanlı Devleti ve Medeniyeti Tarihi*, 2. Cilt, ed. Ekmeleddin İhsanoğlu, İstanbul: İslam Tarih, Sanat ve Kültür Araştırma Merkezi (IRCICA), 1998. p. 9.

<sup>191</sup> Kaya Şahin, “Constantinople and the End Time: The ottoman Conquest as a Portent of the Last Hour”, *Journal of Early Modern History* 14 (2010), Brill. pp. 317-354. p. 331.

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 332.

<sup>193</sup> See, Ahmet Yaşar Ocak, “Din ve Düşünce” in *Osmanlı Devleti ve Medeniyeti Tarihi 2. cilt*, ed. Ekmeleddin İhsanoğlu, İstanbul: İslam Tarih, Sanat ve Kültür Araştırma Merkezi (IRCICA), 1998.p. 137- 139.

presented to Mehmed I in 1414, the sultan was compared to the Messiah (*Mehdi*) like whom he ruled with justice and conquered new territories.<sup>194</sup> Likewise, it is also known that the Aqqyunlu sultan Uzun Hasan (r. 1453-1478) made usage of political astrology and the science of letters imbued with messianic and apocalyptic discourses so as to legitimize his own reign.

Nevertheless, there are also two more features of Ahmed Bican's case which rendered it unique. To begin with, his father Salih seems to be acquainted with the arts of foretelling the future as he also penned “a detail study of natural and atmospheric events, days and months and their specific meanings.”<sup>195</sup> Secondly, it is probable that, during his study in Egypt, Ahmed came across some apocalyptic texts. In the sixteenth chapter of *Dürr-i Meknun*, Ahmed addresses a book on “hidden things”. He indicates that this book was preserved in Egypt and mentions its contents.<sup>196</sup> This intellectual milieu in Egypt is important as two important figures of Ottoman apocalypticism and messianism of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, Şeyh Bedreddin<sup>197</sup> (1416) and 'Abd al-Rahman Bistami<sup>198</sup> (d. 1454), studied there.

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<sup>194</sup> See the translation of Abdülvasi Çelebi's *Halilname* in Dimitris J. Kastritsis, *Ottoman Empire and its Heritage, Volume 38: Sons of Bayezid : Empire Building and Representation in the Ottoman Civil War of 1402-1413*. Boston, MA, USA: Brill Academic Publishers, 2007. p 221-222.

“Wherever he goes, with divine assistance he conquers provinces  
Whenever he makes it his goal, begs submit to him  
A great khan, of great lineage and great devlet  
That is the proof that he is the Mahdi!  
His name is Muhammad, his custom religious law (şeri'at)  
If the Mahdi appears, then so does divine truth!”

<sup>195</sup> Kaya Şahin mentions Salahüddin Salih b. Süleyman el-Malkavari's *Şemsiyye* in “Constantinople and the End Time: The ottoman Conquest as a Portent of the Last Hour”, p. 333.

<sup>196</sup> “Pes ol cifir kitabı bin yedi yüz satırdır ki Ali hazretleri deve derisine yazmış. Anın için cifir dediler. Anın içinde yirmi sekiz suret vardır. Her suret yetmiş padişahın adına işaretdir” Yazıcıoğlu Ahmed Bican, *Dürr-i Meknun*, p. 117.

<sup>197</sup> See *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, “Badr al-Din”: “He was taught the basis of Islamic religion and law by his father and, later on, by the jurist Yusuf and Shahidi. His subsequent studies took him to Bursa, in the company of his friend Musa Çelebi, better known as Kadizade-i Rumi, a brilliant mathematician and astronomer. Up to 1381, he studied logic and astronomy in Konya under a certain Fayd Allah. After that, Badr al-Din went to Jerusalem, there he worked under the otherwise not particularly well known Ibn al- 'Askalani; then he went to Cairo, attracted by the teaching of such famous scholars as Mubarakshah al-Mantiki, the physician Hadjdji Pasha, the philosopher and lawyer 'Ali b. Muhammad al-Sayyid al-Sharif al-Djurdjani, and a certain 'Abd al-Latif.”

<sup>198</sup> Ibid, “Al-Bistami, 'Abd al-Rahman”: “He studied in Cairo and went to Bursa, then the Ottoman capital and imperial residence [...] He was a mystic, belonging, as his name indicates, to the Hurufi

Even though Ahmed Bican does not refer to Bedreddin in his works, Bistami's *Miftah al-Djafr al-Djami* seems to be Ahmed's fundamental source for divination since he mentions the name of it with great respect. Actually, Bistami's works on *'ilm al-huruf* and *jafr* were frequently cited and epitomized in the Islamic world, and they were also adumbrated through recurrent references in the Ottoman context. This, of course, mostly stems from the fact that Bistami taught his esoteric sciences to the elites of what remained of the Ottoman dominions and other principalities in Anatolia.<sup>199</sup> He also lived in Bursa, passing the rest of his life writing on sciences such as history, medicine, mysticism, letters and divination. In 1455, two years after the conquest of Constantinople, he concluded the third chapter of *Nazm al-suluk fi musamarat al-muluk* (“The ordering of conduct for the accompaniment of kings”) as follows:

“The Prophet said: ‘The Deceiver [Dajjal] will not emerge until people have become indifferent to remembrance of God; and the Last Hour will not commence until Constantinople and its cities have been conquered...’ The divine secrets and radiant clues have been completed on a day in which the Judgment will begin and the trials will be imminent.”<sup>200</sup>

Even after two centuries after his death, Bistami was still extolled as an authority on occult cosmology and the science of letters. Since many of his works are on Constantinople and “greater” Rome, they were widely in circulation in the royal library in the Topkapı Palace. Therefore, it can be inferred that the prophetic and eschatological meaning of the conquest of Constantinople was still important for the Ottoman dynastic house. However, this was also related to expectations of the Muslim conquest of Rome, which would be accomplished by Mahdi. Especially his *Miftah al-Djafr al-Djami* generated the stimulus for the Ottoman apocalypticism in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, forming a solid background for dynastic eschatological roles in the Süleymanic age. Remarkably enough, the formulation of charismatic leadership consolidated with apocalyptic rhetoric did not fade with Mehmed II’s image, as it converged on the “classical” Ottoman regime shaped under Sultan Süleyman the Lawgiver (r. 1520-1566). Actually,

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order of dervishes, who attributed a mystical significance to the letters of the alphabet and combination of these.”

<sup>199</sup> Cornell H. Fleischer, “Ancient Wisdom and New Sciences in the Fifteenth and Early Sixteenth Centuries,” in *Falnama: The Book of Omens*, ed. Massumeh Farhad, London: Thames & Hudson, 2010. pp. 231-143. p. 232.

<sup>200</sup> Qtd. by Cornell H. Fleischer in “Ancient Wisdom and New Sciences in the Fifteenth and Early Sixteenth Centuries, p. 232.

in the first half of 16<sup>th</sup> century, Constantinople had still an important focus in the apocalyptic prophecies since it was perceived as the arena in which the final battles would take place.<sup>201</sup>

In fact, Mongol invasion had not only an impact on the works of cosmology, but also on the messianic expectations throughout the Islamic world. Different religious movements in Iran, Eastern Anatolia and Mesopotamia began to deal with messianism. These nascent religious discourses emerging in that period emphasized that the Last Hour was near. Yet, they were not merely peculiar to abovementioned territories, as such an affinity to apocalypticism was reflected through the works by Ibn Kathir (1300-1373) which were very popular in Syria and Egypt.<sup>202</sup> These movements have traditionally been interpreted as signs to the rise of the Shiite Safavids around 1500, and consequently they have been referred as “heterodox”. Nonetheless, with their recent studies, Shahzad Bashir and Said Amir Arjomand have distanced themselves from the conventional attitude and analyzed the interactions between apocalyptic movements in the post-Mongol Islamic world beyond the limitations of traditional approach which had a tendency to discriminate every deviation from orthodoxy through Shiite discourse.<sup>203</sup> Hence, it is important to pinpoint the correlations between Sunni and Shiite messianic movements as there are particular figures among scholars and literati who described

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<sup>201</sup> See Barbara Flemming; “Public Opinion Under Sultan Süleyman” in *Süleyman The Second and His Time*, ed. by Halil İnalçık and Cemal Kafadar, İstanbul: İsis Yayıncılık, 1993. pp. 49-58.

<sup>202</sup> See, *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, “Ibn Kathir”. He was one of the well known historians of Syria under the Bahri Mamluk dynasty.

<sup>203</sup> For example, a “heterodox” movement, Hurufism, founded by Fazlallah Astarabadi (c. 1340-1396) and based on the science of letters, had also a short story of proselytization effort in the Ottoman Empire. A famous biographer of early Ottoman scholars indicates that around 1450, some followers of Fazlallah was able to enter the company of young Sultan Mehmed II and make him interested in their doctrines. The vizier Mahmud Pasha unwillingly avoided to intervene fearing the ruler’s displeasure. Thus, he decided to elicit the aid of a certain Mawla Fakhr al-Din ‘Ajami who was a prominent scholar under the court’s patronage, in investigating the matter. Then, Mahmud Pasha invited the leader of the Hurufi group yet when the Hurufi began to map out all of their doctrines, including the topic of *hulul* (the idea that divinity can reside in a human body), Fakhr al-Din cursed the “heretic” alarmingly. The Hurufi leader went to the palace to seek refuge with Sultan Mehmed, yet Fakhr al-Din pursued him. He was then taken to the new mosque in Edirne and declared Hurufis’ beliefs through adding the spiritual reward to be gained by participating in putting them to death. This was how the leader of the group and then the rest was put in the fire by the others. According to Shahzad Bashir, this abbreviated version of the actual incident was mentioned in a work penned by an opponent of Fazlullah, most probably belonging to Sunni ulema group. Yet, he also states that if Mehmed II had had a clear opposition against Hurufi movement, such an account referring to his name could not have been easily written. See, Shahzad Bashir, *Fazlullah Esterabadi ve Hurufilik*, (çev. Ahmet Tunç Şen), İstanbul: Kitap Yayınevi, 2012. p. 97-98.

themselves as Sunni, yet showed no qualms in extending the limits of their knowledge through entering the “Shiite” frontiers, such as Bistami, Ibn Kathir, and Ahmed Bican.

Apart from the Chapter 17, “On the Signs of the Hour” (*Eşrat-ı Saat Beyânındadır*), the End of Time is rarely mentioned in the rest of *Dürr-i Meknun*, unlike Ahmed Bican’s other works such as *Envari’l Âşıkîn* and *Münteha* which allot significant place to this subject. In the introduction of *Dürr-i Meknun*, Ahmed depicts himself as a man of knowledge.<sup>204</sup> He indicates that he will popularize the religious knowledge which he has gathered. Also, he states that this knowledge is the true wealth as it also differs him from the others who flamboyantly build mosques and hospices to leave a remark of their names for posterity.<sup>205</sup> In the last two chapters of his work, after mapping out the signs of the Last Hour (attack of *Banu al-Asfar*, the coming of Dajjal, the descent of Christ, the emergence of Gog and Magog, the appearance of the Beast of the Earth (*dabbetü’l arz*), rising of the Sun in the west, the gate of repentance, the taking of the Quran up to the heavens, the rising of the Smoke, the first sounding of the Trump, the ruin of lands and cities) Ahmed underlines again that the life in this world is temporary and warns that Muslims should be prepared for the afterlife.<sup>206</sup> In order to fully capture the reflections of Islamic apocalypticism in *Dürr-i Meknun*, I will briefly tap into the necessary vocabulary of this canon. *Al-qiyama*, literally meaning “to rise, to stand up” refers to the death of all living beings at the end of life on the earth, and their resurrections by God.<sup>207</sup> The term is frequently referred in the various *suras* of the Quran which decree that on the day of resurrection, unbelievers will be punished with

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<sup>204</sup> “Pes Hak te’ala hazretlerinin kudretinde ve azametinde bir mikdar ilmim olduğu kadar beyan edelim. Ta kim Hak te’alanın kudretin ve kuvvetin ve azametinin bundan kıyas edesin ve bu azıcık ömür içinde bu fitne zamanında cihanı geşt edip gezmeğe ihtiyaç olmaya. Nice pare kitaplardan cem’ eylediğim, tefasirlerden ve kimi ehadis-i nebeviyyeden ve kimi rivayetle hikayetlerden ki akıl kabul ve tecviz eder. Bu cümleden cem’ edip getirip bir kitab etdim ve adını *Dürr-i Meknun* koydum.” *Dürr-i Meknun*, p. 19-20.

<sup>205</sup> “Pes niceler, imaretler ve zaviyeler yaparlar. Kapılarında tarihler ve kendi adlarını ve isimlerini yazdırırlar, Muradları oldur ki halk anı görüp bu falan kişinin hayrı imiş, ne hayırlı kişi imiş desinler zikredeler. Öyle olsa, bunun gibi nesnelere riyâdır. [...] İmdi, bu fakirin mali yok kim mescidler medreseler yapa. Pes ehl-i ilmin malı ve hazinesi ilimdir. Nitekim malın zekatı ve ilmin dahi zekatı var. İlmin zekatı oldur ki okuduğu ilimden halka bildire ve talim ede ve niçeler ann ilminden fayda göreler” *ibid.*, 20.

<sup>206</sup> “İmdi aklımızı başımıza derelim. Birkaç gün bu azıcık ömür içinde ne çekersek çekelim; bu fani dünyanın hoşluğuna aldanmayıp gafleti gözümüzden götürelim. Dünya dediğin tez geçer. Dünya metai kalildir.” *ibid.*, 134.

<sup>207</sup> Louis Gardet, “Kiyama”, *Encyclopedia of Islam 2*, electronic edition, Bekir Topaloğlu, “Kıyamet”, Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslam Ansiklopedisi 25.

great torment and their deviation will be judged. Along with the description of resurrection, the allusions related to the concepts of heaven and hell are also mentioned. Within the context of Islamic mysticism, resurrection means rising from the dead and coming into communion, while the after world (*ahiret*) refers to disappearance of a form and its transformation into another form. Within the same line of thought,

“rising from the dead after having died in this world to live a transitional life of elevation or abasement is called ‘*kiyamet-i sugra*’ (the small resurrection); the hearts remaining eternally alive in the sacred realm after the voluntary death (total resignation from blessings of this world) is called ‘*kiyamet-i vusta*’ (the middle resurrection); attaining the real life in the ‘*bekabillah makami*’ (the realm of infinity) after arriving at the ‘*fenafillah mertebes*’ (becoming part of God) is called ‘*kiyamet-i kübra*’ (the great resurrection).”<sup>208</sup>

However, the common approach to the text has claimed that Ahmed Bican intended to marshal foreshadowings of the End throughout his work as he had a tone of urgency. Such an argument on *Dürr-i Meknun* reverberates the comments on other Islamic apocalypses whose narrators have been thought to inaugurate an alteration for the readers' views on future. One example for this can be given by David Cook's view as he avers: “The Muslim apocalypticist seeks to create a sequence of events that leads up to a final decisive point that is so shattering to his audience that the result of the experience is a change of outlook. Doubtless this would involve people seeing that their everyday lives are insignificant in comparison to the immediate fact of Judgement Day, and the tribulations accompanying it.”<sup>209</sup> Such an attempt to draw a parallel between social criticism and apocalypticism has already abandoned in the fields of theology and medieval studies, yet it still prevalent in Ottoman studies and Islamology in general.

A recent study by Kaya Şahin defines Ahmed Bican as an apocalyptic due to his depiction of social unrest in *Dürr-i Meknun*, and categorizes the work as the “moral apocalypse” based on David Cook's theoretical concept. Şahin asserts that Ahmed Bican thinks that there is an acceleration of moral decline in society: administrators become oppressive, judges accept bribes, women wander alone in streets and marketplaces. He is also concerned with the attitudes of religious scholars who did not

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<sup>208</sup> Nezihe Seyhan, “Resurrection Day In Divan Literature” in *Language & Theology*, Vol. 18. No. 1, 2004. pp. 62-76. p. 64-65.

<sup>209</sup> David Cook, *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic*, p.19-20.

take an action against these corruptions on grounds of losing their privileges. Şahin also pinpoints that this depiction of an “immoral society” associated with the author’s own society becomes meaningful with the seventeenth chapter of the book entitled “*Eşrat-ı Saat*” in which Ahmed maps out the omens of the End such as hypocrisy and adultery, and claims that since they already exist in his society, the end is near.<sup>210</sup> Şahin assumes that the portrait of the social chaos in the 17<sup>th</sup> chapter is related to Ahmed’s own contemporary society.<sup>211</sup> However, the narrator’s tone on moral decay in his society is not posited in the very centre of the chapter, as the main theme is given in the future tense, besides, there is no account on significant events or figures, so it can be easily asserted that this depiction is beyond any “historical” restrictions as it is timeless, and general. Furthermore, Ahmed concludes the chapter by saying that he has summarized the circumstances of the Gathering and Resurrection on Judgement Day which can be interpreted as the main topic of that part.<sup>212</sup>

While Yerasimos interprets the eschatological story in *Dürr-i Meknun* as Ahmed Bican’s response to his own time, and names him as an apocalyptic, Laban Kaptein avers that the eschatological materials are “general, timeless and interchangeable,” therefore, “there is no basis for the view that an anxious Bijan wrote this text in response to a supposed decaying society in the first half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century.”<sup>213</sup> Even though Ahmed Bican criticizes his own society between the lines, the general tone of the text and especially the 17<sup>th</sup> chapter do not imply that this “immoral” society is the

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<sup>210</sup> Kaya Şahin, “Constantinople and the End Time: The ottoman Conquest as a Portent of the Last Hour”, p. 339-341.

<sup>211</sup> “Mehdi hazretleri hurucunun ilm-i cifırde Resul hazretleri ‘alâmetdir”dedi. Amma, evvela bu halk içre çok türlü ahvâl-i kabayih belire. Mescidler çok amma namaz kılar kişi az ola ve kılanın dahi namazlarında huşû olmaya. Zira kisblerinde helâl ve haram fark olmaya. Zira mushaflar münakkaş ve müzehheb ola, amma okuyup amel etmeyeler. Oğlanlar emir gibi ola. Yüksek çardaklar yapalar. Halk dünyaya haris ola. Ehl-i marifete, ehl-i takvaya rağbet olmaya. Rağbet ehl-i dünyaya ola. Avretlerde hayâ kalmaya, avret avrete, er ere düşe. Yalancı şeyler çok ola. Beyler adl sûretinde zulüm edeler. Vüzera rind ve kalles olalar. Ulema fisk ede. Kadılar rüşvet-hôr olalar. Zina ve livata ve suci içmek aşikâre ola. [...] Avretlerde pazarlarda gezeler, kisbler eyleyeler. Nâmahrem ile ulemâ mansıb korkusundan tınmayalar. Avretler sığır alayı gibi sokaklarda gezeler. Kendilerini ere benzeteler. Yetimler malını yiyeler. Zuafayı esirgemeyeler. Beyler ulu işleri alçak kimseye ısmarlayalar. Hayinlere emin diyeler; harirler giyeler. Avretler hamir içeler. Fukara matrud ola. Mazlumlar dinlenmeye. Ahkâm fâcir, ümerâ tâcir ola. Çobanlar kurd ola. Beyler lâhî ola. İlim ve amel hayal ola.” *Dürr-i Meknun*, p. 122.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid., p. 132.

<sup>213</sup> Laban Kaptein, *Apocalypse and the Antichrist Dajjal in Islam: Ahmed Bijan’s Eschatology Revisited*, Asch (privately published), 2011. p. 138.

one the author lives in. Thus, I second Laban's argument here since seemingly Ahmed makes no effort to relate the traditional omens of the End to the events happening around him.

In fact, *Dürr-i Meknun* dwells on the perception that the lifespan of the world, beginning with its creation and finishing with its end. Even though Ahmed Bican's other pious work *Envarü'l Âşıkîn* presents cosmic entities, the apocalypse and eschatology too, it does not give specific dates or chronologies.<sup>214</sup> According to Şahin again, the realization of a prophecy, the conquest of Constantinople, differs *Dürr-i Meknun* from Ahmed Bican's other works as it was penned after this triggering event. Even though Ahmed maps out the conquest of Constantinople as one of the precursors of the End, he does not mention if this has been realized or not.<sup>215</sup> However, in *Envarü'l Âşıkîn*, there is an explicit remark signifying that the work was written several years before the fall of Constantinople: "From the emergence of Rum until the taking of Istanbul seven years will pass."<sup>216</sup> Apparently, Ahmed Bican was not particularly impressed by the conquest of Constantinople as a sign of the coming End. The lack of "subjective" comments on the event as one might expect an apocalyptic to do, stems from the reading and writing practices of the era. Probably, the sources that Ahmed used to compose his work were penned before the conquest and had also a timeless tone.<sup>217</sup>

Of course, this does not mean that Ahmed Bican did not apply to prophetic sayings, the chronological calculations of the Byzantine and Islamic traditions. Within the framework of the text, the emphasis is on the assumption that the Last Hour is only known by God as this idea permeates Islam. However, unlike his previous works, in *Dürr-i Meknun*, he makes estimations on the lifespan of the world. It can be understood from his narrative tone that, rather than as an apocalyptic, Ahmed Bican as a mystic is aware of the inexorable flow of time approaching to a final and attempts not to indulge

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<sup>214</sup> *Envarü'l Âşıkîn*, (Hazırlayan: Arslan Tekin & Melek Tekin), İstanbul: Bedir Yayınevi, p. 425-443.

<sup>215</sup> "Ve dahi kıyamet âlâmetleri ve Mehdî'nin hurucu, Beni Asfer'in ve Deccâl'in ve Kostantiniyye fethi ve 'İsa'nın nüzülü ve Ye'cüc ve Me'cüc'ün çıkacağı ve güneş Magrib'den doğacağı, küllisi tafsîl üzre beyân olunmuşdur. Biz dahi anları bir bir mahallinde inşaallahu te'alâ beyân ederiz." *Dürr-i Meknun*, p. 117.

<sup>216</sup> *Envarü'l Âşıkîn*, p. 426.

<sup>217</sup> For a possible list of the sources used by Ahmed Bican, see Laban Kaptein, *Apocalypse and the Antichrist Dajjal in Islam: Ahmed Bijan's Eschatology Revisited*, p. 191-204.



in this transient existence. Hence, the parts about the End Time are entwined with various prophetic sayings.<sup>218</sup> Through citing another hadith, he demonstrates that the Last Hour will start around 900 AH / 1494-95 CE since moral decay, oppression, plagues, and natural disasters such as flood and earthquakes will get on the stage after 900 AH.<sup>219</sup>

His estimations hinge on the argument which states that the lifetime of the world was decided by God as seventy thousand years. Owing to the fact that human beings has been on Earth for 62,960; seven thousand years remained, and until the Last Judgement, the Earth would be forlorn.<sup>220</sup> These chronological estimations shed light on the fact that Ahmed Bican was closely acquainted with the seven-thousand-year cycle of the Byzantine tradition. Nonetheless, so as to make it consonant with the Islamic tradition, he revises the Byzantine tradition.<sup>221</sup> Whereas Byzantine scholars estimated the year 1492 as the end, the prediction was different in hadiths and divination treatises. Hence, Ahmed Bican attempts to illuminate this discrepancy through claiming that the calculations of the Byzantine tradition depend upon solar years whereas the Muslims hinge on a lunar calendar. Therefore, the 7,000 years of the Byzantine tradition is equal to 7,210 lunar years.<sup>222</sup>

In order to disseminate the nearness of the Last Hour, Ahmed Bican represents the prophecies imbued in divinatory treatises. According to Islamic tradition, divination, *jafr*, relies on the assumption that a secret knowledge related to the fate of humanity

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<sup>218</sup> For example; “Resulullah hazretlerine sordular ki, 'Kıyamet ne vakit kopar?' Buyurdular ki 'Anı Allah bilir. Kıyamet için ne yarak etdiniz?' dedi. Dahi 'Ben ve kıyamet ikimiz beraber geldik. Ben biraz ondan ön geldim' diye mübarek iki parmaklarını gösterdi.” *Dürr-i Meknun*, p. 116.

<sup>219</sup> “Ve dahi Resul buyurdu: 'Benim hicretimin dokuz yüzünden sonra uzlet helal ola.” *Ibid.*, p. 123.

<sup>220</sup> “Eydürler kim bu cihanın ömrü yetmiş bin yıldır. Altmış iki bin dokuzyüz altmış yıl olacak. Eydürler, yedi bin yıl daha adem hükmedecektir. İlm-i nücum iktizai üzere kırk yıl da bu alem fani olacak, ıssız yatacaktır” *ibid*, 116.

<sup>221</sup> Kaya Şahin, “Constantinople and the End Time: The ottoman Conquest as a Portent of the Last Hour”, p. 342.

<sup>222</sup> “Eydürler ki Âdem yaratıldan beri yedi bin yıl olacak devr-i kamerdir; tamam olur, yıl ana derler. Bu itibar üzere ki bir yaz bir kış olur. Şems, oniki burcu bir yazda ve bir kışda tamam eyler. Bir nevrüzdün bir nevrüze değindir. Amma bu görünen ay ki on ikide bir yıl tamam olur. Hicret tarihi muharremden muharreme değindir. Ol şems seyrine uymaz. Otuz yılda bir devreyler. Anın için muharrem gâh kışa gâh yaz gelir. Yedi bin yıllık kebisesi iki yüz on yıl olsa gerekdir. Bâkisini bundan kıyas eyle. Bu ilm-i nücum kavaididir. Sihatini Allah bilir. Ammâ kıyametden kimse yakın haber vermedi. Âmma nişanlarını Resul (a.s.) haber verdi.” *Dürr-i Meknun*, p. 120-121.

was transmitted to Ali b. Abi Talib by Muhammad himself, and it was written by Ali on a camel-skin parchment.<sup>223</sup> On top of that, it is generally believed that the transmission of this knowledge was concomitant with 'Ali's direct descendants, to wit, the Shiite imams. However, this does not mean that this circumstance reduces the contact of Sunnis with divination. Even though *jafr* has not been recognized as a part of the orthodox Muslim corpus, the canon of prophecy, astrological tables auguring the future, science of letters has been in wide circulation among many Muslim scholars and literati. Especially with the chaotic environment of the Islamic world after the end of 13<sup>th</sup> century, divinatory techniques roused up gaining a new wave of popularity.

The social-cultural milieu that Ahmed Bican is a part of, was also under the influences of apocalypticism. Apparently, Ahmed knew Bistami, the divinatory master of the time, in person, and through him, Ahmed manages to step into a larger plane of Islamic tradition of divination. For instance, the sixteenth chapter of *Dürr-i Meknun* is rooted in the secrets of divination and it aims to develop an apocalyptic narrative in the Ottoman context through introducing Bistami's work which has an important impact on the Islamic tradition of divination. Furthermore, Ahmed Bican presents Bistami as “the most respected scholar who knows and interprets God's secrets,” and indicates that he has used *Miftah* as his source.<sup>224</sup> Following this, he highlights that such an important knowledge should be hidden from those who do not have the qualifications to properly use it.<sup>225</sup> He also emphasizes his difference from fortune-tellers who are Satan's puppets. Thus, what is crucial for Ahmed is not a temporal profit, yet a divine message.

According to Ahmed Bican, divination is a concept of secret knowledge which goes back to God via Prophet himself. When God sends Muhammed an apple, his grandchildren's tutor mistakenly eats it. As soon as he bites the apple, he enters through an imaginary portal and talks about hidden affairs. As many people come to listen to

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<sup>223</sup> “A Batini tradition tells that the Prophet, when on the point of death, said to 'Ali b. Abi Talib, 'O 'Ali, when I am dead, wash me, embalm me, clothe me and sit me up; then, I shall tell thee what shall happen until the day of resurrection'. When he was dead, 'Ali washed him, embalmed him, clothed him and sat him up; and then Muhammad told him what would happen until the day of resurrection”, *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, “Djarf”.

<sup>224</sup> “Şeyhü'l-muhakkikin el-alimü yekşifü esrarullahi ve ayatihî Şeyh Abdurrahman el-Bestâmî kuddise sırruhü'l-aziz sahibü'l-huruf hazretleri, ol vâridat-ı gaybiyyeden bazı hususla anı kabul eyledi. Hâl diliyle tâbir eyledi. Bu duâyı Türkî dille getirip kitabımıza yazdık. Her ilimden birer şemme tattırdık.”, *Dürr-i Meknun*, p. 117.

<sup>225</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 117-118.

him, Muhammed stops him going any further. However, his words are already heard by some Muslims who later write them in verse.<sup>226</sup> There is also a book, named *Jafr 'Ali* ("Ali's Divination") which provides account on the dynasties that will rule between Muhammed and the Last Hour.<sup>227</sup>

Succeeding this, he demonstrates typical aspects of divination treatise. Focusing on *jafr*, Ahmed Bican highlights that political fortune (*devlet*) does not sojourn in the same dynasty all the time, yet it travels from one dynasty to another.<sup>228</sup> Its next station is the Muslim dynasty that will take over the control of Rum lands. This overlaps with the time when the signs of the Last Hour will appear. Furthermore, the overlapping of the young man's names Mahmud and Muhammad seems more than a coincidence: Mehmed, whose name is the Turkish form of the Arabic Muhammad is the ruler of the Ottomans at that time.<sup>229</sup>

Nonetheless, in order to obtain a more concrete analysis of Ahmed Bican's apocalyptic convictions, Şahin Kaya touches upon his final judgement, the *Münteha* ("The Epilogue"), which outlines a number of propositions in relation to apocalyptic comments. In fact, the work was written twice, once in the second half of 1453 CE, and then in Muharrem 870 AH/August-September 1465 CE.<sup>230</sup> Actually, the first version does not embody apocalyptic comments, while the second version, which was penned after *Dürr-i Meknun*, does. In both versions, Ahmed Bican signs *Münteha* and gives specific dates in a vivid portrait of historical period, unlike in *Dürr-i Meknun*.<sup>231</sup>

The treatment of Mehmed II in *Münteha* ("The Epilogue") is also different from *Dürr-i Meknun*. Obviously, the narrator praises Mehmed II as a just sultan who is

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<sup>226</sup> Ibid., p. 116.

<sup>227</sup> Ibid., p. 117.

<sup>228</sup> "Evvel ma'mur yer şehri Medayin idi. Medayin harab olunca devlet Horosan'a intikal etdi. Cümle alemin nazarı ve itba'ı Horosan'a oldu. Ol dahi tamam olunca bu kez devlet Mısır'a intikal etdi. Haliya cümlemin teveccühü ve hüsn-i nazarı Mısır-ı Kahire'yedir." ibid, 123.

<sup>229</sup> "Ve dahi demişler mülk-i Rum'a sonra padişah olan bir yalın yüzlü oğlan ola. Ol vakit vay Rum'un haline! Ol oğlanın isminde iki mim ola. Muhammed ya da Mahmud gibi bir mim evvelinde, bir mim ahirinde ola" ibid, 119.

<sup>230</sup> For the first version of the text, see the copies at Süleymaniye Library, ms. Hacı Mahmud Efendi 2267, Kılıç Paşa 630, Tercüman 204. For the later version see, Süleymaniye Library, ms. Hacı Mahmud Efendi 1657. The completion date is provided in 232a.

<sup>231</sup> See, *Münteha*, in Süleymaniye Library, ms. Hacı Mahmud Efendi 1657. 2b.

engaged in *gaza*, and depicts the sultan as the conqueror of Constantinople and an apocalyptic warrior who will fulfill another prophecy: the conquest of Rome. This kind of presentation of the Ottoman sultan in the *Münteha* consolidates Mehmed II's role as the protector of the Muslims against the Blond Peoples since the Resurrection is near. Thus in a nutshell, whereas in the *Münteha*, there is an explicit attitude towards Mehmed II and the fall of Constantinople, *Dürr-i Meknun* is silent, not giving clues about its own time period. However, indeed, Kaya's theorization of *Münteha* does not take "the narrative triangle" into consideration: *Münteha* is actually the title of the translation given by Ahmed Bican to his brother Mehmed's succinct Arabic apostil on Ibn Arabi's *Fusus al-hikam*. Furthermore, there are two different manuscripts titled *Münteha* which are attributed to Ahmed Bican, and this brings to mind there might be another author who re-wrote the later version by adding new parts.<sup>232</sup>

However, the obvious difference in the tones of two texts can be related to the realization of a prolonged Muslim dream: the conquest of Constantinople. However, on top of that, the two works have a distinct style of narration which can clearly be seen through the very first pages of both texts. In the *Münteha*, the narrator has a direct reference to his period, mentioning Mehmed II and his just reign. On the other hand, the very first pages of *Dürr-i Meknun* do not provide a sense of clarity on its time context. This mostly stems from the fact that, these two texts pertain to different genres, even though the definition of genre is difficult to clarify in the pre-modern era, it can be illustrated through the distinctive motives that push the writer to compose his work. *Dürr-i Meknun* can be categorized as a book of cosmology, due to its themes and style. Nevertheless, this does not prevent the narrator from adding his concerns related to the coming End. The nearness of the End is not a topic that only emerges in the times of crisis, as it has a strict relation with the rise of Islam. Ahmed Bican, as a pious intellectual, is always conscious of the final Reckoning, yet this does not necessarily make him an apocalyptic. The underlying reasons for him to pen a work of cosmology is to remind the people the power of God and call them to prepare for an afterworld through evoking them from their laxity. The knowledge of God's ordinances which is formulated in Turkish, the language of Ahmed Bican's people, is the crucial need to

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<sup>232</sup> Ayşe Beyazıt, "Ahmed Bican'ın 'Müntehâ' İsimli Fusuh Tercümesi Işığında Tasavvuf Düşüncesi", MA Thesis, İstanbul: Marmara University, 2008. p. 51.

bring salvation in the future. Through this, Ahmed Bican actualizes his deeds pertaining to his ethical responsibility as a pious man.

## CONCLUSION

Ahmed Bican's *Dürr-i Meknun* offers a modicum of various subjects which can be thematized under the genre of cosmology. However, giving generic titles to pre-modern texts is much more related to categorization of knowledge and science in the modern era. This is why, the boundaries amidst the genres of pre-modern world seem permeable as it can be exemplified through *Dürr-i Meknun*.

This study has a restricted scope mainly focusing on the reconsideration of Yerasimos's statement on the usage of legends about Constantinople and theme of apocalypse as a reaction against Mehmed II's imperial project. I believe that beginning with a deconstruction of Yerasimos's argument which has automatically been referred to in the studies mostly about Mehmed II's period, will radically pose new questions to *Dürr-i Meknun* which is worthy of reading and further exploration.

Through a close reading of the text and bearing in mind its historical context, I evaluate *Dürr-i Meknun* not as an apocalyptic work, yet as an example of Islamic cosmology. Comparing it with the other works penned in different geographies, I claim that the central theme in *Dürr-i Meknun* revolves around the problem of human beings's position towards God. Illustrating that every created thing is a wonder and the reflection of God's existence, Ahmed Bican invites his readers to marvel at God's ultimate power. However, just belief in God is not sufficient to refresh one's faith, as there will be a judgement day and an eternal life. For Ahmed who is conscious of this Judgement, indulging in daily life will not bring salvation, therefore to know God's ordinances is a must. This is why Ahmed Bican pens his work in a plain Turkish avoiding a discursive style to make it understandable for his own people. Moreover, through instructing them how to pursue a life dedicated to Islam, Ahmed Bican also realizes his own social responsibility as a pious man. On the other hand, his narration is not time-bound which makes it difficult to aver that legends on Constantinople, or the theme of apocalypse, are deliberately put to criticize the politics in his own time. In fact, *Dürr-i Meknun* can be evaluated as an accumulation of cosmological knowledge that was in circulation during the scene of the 15<sup>th</sup> century and was not only endemic to lands of Islam as there are striking similarities and continuity of various cultural legacies.

Dealing with pre-modern texts is a hard task for modern scholars as it requires to take off our post-modern lenses while observing them. As a result of recent theories on literature, our modern eyes initially look for symbols, and underlying statements that are intentionally put by the author. Nevertheless, this is a much more valid method particularly for modern texts, as their authors are generally aware of literary theories. On the other hand, pre-modern texts have a direct narrative, in most of the cases they present the pure ideas of their authors. I am not against the usage of literary theories while analyzing pre-modern texts as they are essential instruments for a concrete argument, yet modern scholars should be aware of the fact that attempts to draw parallels between these texts and literary theories do not have a stable position. Conclusions based on direct references to the anonymity of *Dürr-i Mekkun* as an oft-encountered feature of an apocalyptic text can be seen as a problem regarding generalization of different texts under one umbrella term. Actually, the anonymity of a pre-modern Ottoman text does not show an explicit anomaly as it is a characteristic of this period. Hence, this is my main criticism against recent studies on *Dürr-i Mekkun* as I have discussed in the last chapter.

Another point should also be highlighted here. As my analysis follows a micro approach, I am not in position to determine whether there is any relationship between legends on Constantinople and criticism against Mehmed II's politics in other texts apart from *Dürr-i Mekkun*. Legends on Constantinople were a popular theme especially among the Ottoman historians and travelers of the pre-modern era. To illustrate, Mustafa Ali and Evliya Çelebi also included these accounts in their works as I have indicated in the second chapter. Since criticisms against Mehmed II are not merely peculiar to his own period, there is an explicit need for further analysis that systematically examine the correlations between the usage of these legends and criticisms against Mehmed II's policies.

Moreover, so as to fully capture the changing dynamics in literature on the capture of Constantinople, a study on the references to Islamic history in *Dürr-i Mekkun* can be illuminative. Especially the question of how Ahmed Bican perceived the Islamic history before the Ottomans will be crucial to discuss. For instance, whether or not he used al-Tabari's accounts can be also addressed in a further research.

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