ABSTRACT

Hearts of Gold and Silver:
The Production of Alchemical Knowledge in the Early Modern Ottoman World

This dissertation is an initial attempt to historically contextualize the Ottoman alchemical literature and those who produced it. Starting in the late fifteenth century, the Islamic tradition of alchemy was transmitted and vernacularized by learned Rumis who would make significant contributions to it over the course of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

The first part of the dissertation introduces the major works, the contents thereof, and the alchemists who authored them in the early modern Ottoman world. I argue that the writings attributed to ‘Alî Çelebi, also known as al-mu’allif al-jadîd (“the new author”), in particular belie the traditional characterization of Ottoman science as stagnant and derivative. At the same time, I maintain that the learned population’s interest in alchemy greatly increased in the early seventeenth century, at a time when the ‘Alî Çelebi corpus began to circulate widely within the Empire and subsequently engendered a period of intense textual activity in this branch of knowledge. Employing the unusual interactions of the Ottoman Sultan Murâd IV (r. 1623-40) with a number of alchemists as a starting point, I link this seventeenth-century moment to the flooding of the eastern Mediterranean world with debased European coins.

In the second part, I focus on the elusive alchemist ‘Alî Çelebi and trace the ways in which his early modern readership actively sought to fashion an author-figure out of a textual material that betrayed limited, and often ambiguous, autobiographical information. After demonstrating that the corpus of alchemical books and treatises ascribed to him had circulated anonymously for almost three decades, I investigate the multiple competing author-figures that
were imagined by the commentators, copyists, and readers of these texts. I attribute the
overwhelming popularity of one of these figures, Eşrefzade ‘Alî, to his distinguished Sufi
pedigree, which emerged gradually over the course of the long seventeenth century as the corpus
reached a larger audience. This, I claim, is indicative of the kinds of circles that were involved in
the (re-)production of alchemical knowledge in the Ottoman world, many of which were
connected to particular Sufi orders.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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At my confused moments, and there were many, my advisor Molly Greene was there to clear my doubts. I cannot count the times that I entered her office in a state of despair, but left the room having found a renewed confidence. She not only believed in my ability to grow intellectually and follow my instincts, but also urged me to ask the kind of difficult questions that guided the dissertation to its completion. It was only after a fateful graduate seminar she taught that I came to realize what an exciting time this is to be studying Ottoman history—her enthusiasm and expertise was my gateway into the field, and I was able to survive what would have otherwise been a daunting task thanks to her mentorship.

Once I started writing, I could not have hoped for a more generous and helpful supporter than Michael Gordin. His thoughtful and astute comments, whose promptness seemed superhuman at times, enabled me to develop many of my embryonic ideas and saved this dissertation from some rather embarrassing mistakes and glaring omissions. By way of introducing me to the History of Science Program seminars, he opened the doors to a wonderful community of scholars whose intellectual rigor was stimulating and positively humbling at the same time.

I was blessed with the presence of a number of distinguished faculty at Princeton University who played a crucial role in my training as a historian over the course of the past six
years. Anthony Grafton read my dissertation in its various stages and provided much appreciated feedback whose value will last long past the end of this particular project. I thank John Haldon for believing in me and backing the direction my research interests ended up taking, I would not have made it this far without his support. Some of my fondest memories of my time in Princeton are his seminars and I am equally indebted to him for helping me to take the plunge into the world of academic publishing at a relatively early stage in my graduate studies. Heath Lowry’s seminars were another high point of my Princeton years: combining historiography, personal stories, and manuscript research in a way few people could, Heath Lowry liberally shared his passion for Ottoman history within and outside the classroom. Maria Mavroudi, who was serendipitously teaching in Princeton during the first two years of my graduate studies, rekindled my interest in the history of esoteric sciences. The long hours of conversation I had with her, over those crucial two years, are largely responsible for the very subject matter of this dissertation.

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In (and around) Princeton, I was fortunate enough to know the friendship of a long list of exceptional individuals that are almost too many to enumerate. I will nonetheless hazard doing just that, fully aware that I will inevitably omit the names of some friends and colleagues: Kutlu Akalın, Hayal Akarsu, Alexander Balistreri, Yeliz Baloğlu, Sarah Brooks, Thomas Carlson, Berker Cengay, Zachary Chitwood, Mehmet Darakçıoğlu, Mark deGroh, Lo Faber, Robert MacGregor, Ben Gross, George Hatke, Kathi Ivanyi, İrfan Karakoç, Hakan Karpuzcu, Deniz and Sevil Kılınçoğlu, Nicholas Marinides, Nikos Michailidis, Anne O’Donnell, Helen Pfeifer, Benjamin MacDonald Schmidt, Nir Shafir, Henry Shapiro, Nebojša Stanković, Jack Tannous, Troy Tice, Akın Ünver, Nurfadzilah Yahaya, and Alden Young, among so many others enriched and enlivened my time in Princeton.

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NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION

In writing the dissertation, I have employed an eclectic transliteration system, which was a necessary evil owing to the presence of quotations, names, and concepts in Arabic, Persian, and Turkish. In doing so, however, I tried to be as consistent as possible. For example, the titles of all Turkish books and treatises have been transliterated according to Eleazar Birnbaum’s system, whether or not the actual titles are in Turkish (thus Mecmû‘atü’l-mücerrebât and not Majmû‘ät al-mujarrabât). The same principle has been applied to personal names as well: Jâbir ibn Ḥayyân, but Meḥmed Nācī rather than Muḥammad Nāţî. Titles that form a part of an individual’s name, such as Efendi, Bey, Sultan, Sheikh, etc. have not been transliterated. Finally, with the exception of historical regions (e.g. Şarûhân), I have used the modern English spelling for all cities and regions.
INTRODUCTION

In an article written in 1936, Rudolf Winderlich, a chemist-cum-historian like many early historians of chemistry, introduced the German orientalist Julius Ruska’s decade of research on Muḥammad Zakariyā ar-Rāzī (d. 925) to an English-speaking audience. Winderlich begins his article with a sentence that succinctly explains what has until recently been the driving force behind the investigation of “Arab alchemy” by Western scholars: “The revival of scientific thought in the Occident did not emanate directly from the study of the Greek writers; on the contrary, the Arabs played an important intermediary rôle.”\(^1\) The triumphalist narrative of the rise of modern science in Europe valued the production of scientific knowledge in the Islamic world only so far as the latter’s contributions to the former. This narrative held that by the late medieval period, the transmission of Arab scientific knowledge (and thereby the Greek scientific traditions) to Europe had already taken place, whether via Muslim Iberia and Sicily or the Byzantine Empire. Whatever came after was irrelevant, for the medieval West had by then taken over the mantle of scientific inquiry.

The internalization of this narrative by the specialist historians of the post-classical Islamic world has had even more pervasive results. Compared to the supposed brilliance of the scientific achievements of the classical period, the late medieval and early modern works on the natural sciences are often depicted as unoriginal, derivative, and ultimately “inferior.” Even some of the more recent studies have attached importance to the scientific literatures of this later period.

\(^1\) R. Winderlich, “Ruska’s researches on the alchemy of al-Razi,” *Journal of Chemical Education* 13 (1936), p. 313.
period to the extent that they were informed by contemporary developments in Europe. The historiography of sciences in the Ottoman world in particular has been beset by this same twin bias: on the one hand, the production of scientific knowledge by Ottomans is compared unfavorably to that of contemporary Western Europe, where the Scientific Revolution(s) had already, and embarrassingly, begun; on the other, the imagined golden age of sciences in the classical period of Islam was juxtaposed to the stagnation of knowledge production at the hands of the Ottomans. The former takes European science to be normative and superficially engages a version of the Needham question: what were the “deficiencies” that had rendered the early modern Ottoman society unable to realize a scientific revolution of its own? The latter bias, in turn, is yet another iteration of the decline narrative that extends far beyond the confines of the history of knowledge in Ottoman historiography and into political, economic, and social history of the post-classical Islamic world.\(^2\) The past two decades, however, have witnessed a growing number of studies that investigate Ottoman science on its own terms and in conjunction with its relation to Ottoman society and culture, rather than employing it to reinforce a pre-existing historical narrative, such as the “decline” of Muslim learning.\(^3\)


\(^3\) One such study is Avner Ben-Zaken’s *Cross-Cultural Scientific Exchanges in the Eastern Mediterranean, 1560-1660* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), which, among other subjects, offers a fresh look on sixteenth-century Ottoman astronomy and timekeeping. Ben-Zaken’s insistence on “exchange” between Western European and Ottoman producers of knowledge, however, is some ways an impediment to a fuller exploration of early modern Ottoman astronomy—especially considering the fact that the evidence to that end appears to be thin. Another recent work is Miri Shefer-Mossensohn’s *Ottoman Medicine: Healing and Medical Institutions, 1500-1700* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 2009). Shefer-Mossensohn socially and culturally contextualizes Ottoman medicine using both Ottoman Turkish and Arabic sources, and accounts for the medical pluralism that existed in the early modern Ottoman world. More importantly, she has convincingly shown Ottoman medicine to be a dynamic branch of knowledge that belies its previously-held stagnant image. Just as important are the studies that have probed the social and cultural history of knowledge in the pre-Ottoman Middle East. Two works, published a decade apart, have been influential in this regard: Jonathan Porter’s *The Transmission of
While certain branches of knowledge, and especially medicine, have benefited to a great degree from these recent studies, others await not simply a fresh look, but rather an initial investigation. Alchemy, considering the thousands of manuscripts produced in the early modern Islamic world on this subject, is one of the most important “unstudied” sciences in the field of Ottoman history. Bruce Moran’s observation that “alchemy has had to struggle against its own historiography in finding a secure place within the history of science,” is not quite applicable to Ottoman alchemy. Indeed, even an exhaustive look at the historiography of the past century reveals that alchemy has been all but ignored by the historians of Ottoman science. Presently, there is not a single monograph on any aspect of alchemy as it was theorized and practiced in the Ottoman world. The handful of articles that do exist treat either the contents of a single manuscript or, even less frequently, an individual alchemical text. One exception is the relatively extensive literature on late seventeenth and eighteenth century Ottoman iatrochemistry, which has been studied primarily by historians of medicine. The most significant scholarly undertaking dealing partly with alchemy is a bio-bibliographical work of reference edited by the Turkish historian of science Ekmeleddin İhsanoğlu—this two volume study on the natural sciences in the Ottoman world includes short biographies of numerous Ottoman alchemist-authors and references to manuscripts containing their writings. While valuable as a starting point for further research, the nature of this work has not allowed its contributors to discuss the

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5 Not all of these admittedly few studies have been carried out by historians of science, or indeed by historians. One interesting example is an article by Zeki Kaymaz, a scholar of Turkish literature. “Aşık Paşa’nın Yayınlanmamış Bir Şiiri Üzerine” in Erol Ülgen and Aygün Ülgen, eds., II. Aşık Paşa Sempozyumu 7-9 Haziran 2011, Kırşehir: Bildiriler (İstanbul: Beşir Kitabevi, 2008) consists of the transliteration, and the facsimile publication, of a poem by the well-known Turkish mystic Aşık Paşa (d. 1333), preceded by a short introduction that notes the subject of the poem as “the four elements.” The short poem in question is in fact an alchemical text in verse and is almost certainly pseudonymous, dating no earlier than the mid-sixteenth century.

contents of the treatises and books which they cite. A number of Western orientalists have similarly provided information on Ottoman alchemists and alchemical works, especially those that had been composed in Arabic, as part of their efforts to catalogue those manuscript collections in European libraries that hold a substantial number of such texts.7

The current state of the historiography for Ottoman alchemy, or lack thereof, stems in part from progressivist views of science, according to which Jabirian alchemy should have been in the dust bin of history by the early modern period.8 And yet it would be inaccurate to implicate the attitudes of modern historians as the sole reason behind the dearth of scholarship on Ottoman alchemy. Learned Ottomans themselves frequently questioned the validity of alchemy’s foundational principles, most notably the possibility of metallic transmutation, and those dabbling in alchemy were often the object of ridicule or censure as was the case in many other parts of the world.9 These historical prejudices have remained current among some of those few scholars who study the history of knowledge in the Ottoman world. To put it simply, alchemy is all too often imagined as being situated awkwardly between science and quackery, between “the rational” and the spiritual.

For the historians of medieval Arab alchemy, a convenient way of dealing with the complexities inherent in the alchemical texts themselves has been to emphasize one dimension of

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7 Most important among them are Alfred Sigel, Katalog der arabischen alchemistischen Handschriften Deutschlands (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1949) and Manfred Ullmann, Katalog der arabischen alchemistischen Handschriften der Chester Beatty Library (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1974).

8 A certain level of ambivalence can be detected in modern studies regarding medieval Arab alchemy, whose scientific credentials are rarely doubted and whose contributions to the emergence of modern chemistry are frequently emphasized. In the early modern period, however, the assumption is that the learned cultures of the Islamic world, including that of the Ottomans, produced derivative works of little interest, especially in light of contemporary developments in Europe. It should be obvious that putting a value judgment on knowledge-production is neither helpful for any serious evaluation of the history of sciences in the Ottoman world nor is it relevant for writing a social and cultural history of knowledge in its Ottoman context.

9 The Islamic alchemical literature, including that of the Ottomans, reflects these criticisms as it frequently enters apologetic discourse. See, for example, below, fn. 34.
alchemical practice to the exclusion of others. Reading the works of Henry Corbin, or his most prolific student Pierre Lory, one might get the impression that Jabirian alchemy was a purely spiritual endeavor. The critiques of Corbin, however, by scholars such as Georges Anawati, take us to the other extreme (and back to an earlier era of unapologetically positivist reading of alchemical texts), wherein Muslim alchemists of the classical period are supposed to be the forerunners of modern scientists, toiling in laboratories that were beacons of rationality.¹⁰

The tension between these two interpretations of what alchemy had meant to its practitioners is also present, and perhaps more fiercely so, in the more recent historiography of early modern European alchemy. Spearheaded by historians of science such as Lawrence Principe and William Newman, the so-called “new historiography of alchemy,” or *chymistry* as its proponents prefer to call it, draws attention to the contributions of alchemy to the Scientific Revolution. They argue that the interest of many luminaries of that era, including Sir Isaac Newton, in alchemy brought about a heightened emphasis on experimentation, and meticulous note taking, which precipitated major advances in other sciences. This revisionist history of alchemy itself is a reaction to the unfavorable light in which alchemy, along with other occult sciences, were considered by previous generations of historians of science such George Sarton. This new historiography has in turn been criticized, above all by Brian Vickers, for neglecting

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¹⁰ Interestingly, Georges Anawati acknowledges that Western alchemists had pursued a spiritual interpretation of their art, but maintains that Arab alchemists had never followed a similar path: “As for the mystic aspect of alchemy as a means of purification of the soul, there is not a whisper either from Avicenna or from Ibn Khaldun. We have to wait for the Western alchemists to engage in this path, and for the philosophical-gnostic speculations of Corbin to reveal them among our Arab authors.” G. Anawati, “Arabic Alchemy” in Roshdi Rashed, ed., *Encyclopedia of the History of Arabic Science*, vol. 3 (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 882.
the mystical dimensions of occult sciences in general and of alchemy (which he considers an occult science) in particular.\textsuperscript{11}

Ottoman alchemists were reading, commenting on, and re-working texts that have been studied by the likes of Corbin and Anawati, while being engaged in these activities and practicing Jabirian alchemy at a time when European chymists were supposedly paving the way to the Chemical Revolution of the eighteenth century. According to the prevailing view among those who followed the Jabirian tradition, alchemy was not just one of the natural sciences, but rather the divine art, the teachings of which allowed sages and philosophers to unlock the deepest mysteries of the universe and granted access to the creating powers of God. This dissertation is a first attempt to investigate the ways in which alchemical knowledge was produced in the early modern Ottoman world: through the lens of heretofore neglected Ottoman alchemical manuscripts, it looks at some of the individuals and learned circles who were engaged in this (re-)production, and their ideas.

The first part of the dissertation is intended as a general introduction to Ottoman alchemical literature and its contents. Chapter One sets some of the parameters for the dissertation, including locality (by making a distinction between the Arab provinces of the Ottoman Empire and the “lands of Rum”) and periodization. The latter is especially pertinent for tracing how Arab alchemical knowledge had been transmitted to, and vernacularized in, by the learned elite in recently conquered northwestern Anatolia, the Balkans, and, after 1453, the city of Istanbul. More specifically, I argue for a gradual introduction of this tradition, with the composition of original texts starting only around the middle of the sixteenth and accelerating

greatly in the seventeenth century. This chapter also attempts to historically contextualize a somewhat unusual chain of events relating to alchemy that transpired in the late 1630s and whose cast of characters includes the Ottoman Sultan Murād IV. Chapter Two provides a summary of some of the more important features of Jabirian alchemy, such as the sulfur-mercury theory and the “science of balance” (‘ilm al-mīzān), and investigates the ways in which Ottoman alchemists had incorporated these elements in their own works. In the case of one Ottoman alchemist-author of the sixteenth century in particular, I show that there are both noticeable departures from, and new emphases on, certain elements of Jabirian alchemy.

The alchemist in question is an enigmatic figure called al-mu’allif al-jadīd (the new, or modern, author), also known as ‘Alī Çelebi, who is the subject of the second part of the dissertation. Chapter Three focuses on the manuscript traditions of the corpus that is attributed to ‘Alī Çelebi, and begins probing the historical significance of his contested identities. After demonstrating that there had been many author-figures imagined by the readers of the corpus, Chapter Four examines the one quasi-historical figure that came to dominate the manuscript tradition in the seventeenth century, but has been since then largely forgotten. The chapter further argues that the rather specific Sufi identity of this figure is indicative of the kinds of circles who were involved in the production of alchemical manuscripts in the early modern Ottoman society.
CHAPTER ONE
Divine Secrets in the Lands of Rum:
Ottoman alchemical literature and Ottoman alchemists, ca. 1500-1650

The textual tradition of Greco-Islamic alchemy resembles a *sea without a shore*:
stretching endlessly from Hellenistic papyri to turn-of-the-twentieth-century manuscripts, it is
home to foamy waves of common concepts and principles, allegories and metaphors that appear,
disappear, and reappear in a multitude of languages, and in vastly disparate cultural milieus.
While this is a tradition that opens up marvelous, if challenging, prospects for the historian of
ideas, it is also one in which social historians can quickly lose their bearings and drift aimlessly.
Few details about the lives of thousands of individual copyists, commentators, and authors who
produced and reproduced alchemical works in the Ottoman world are known. Arguably the most
important Ottoman authority on alchemy, the so-called *al-mu'allif al-jadīd* (the new, or modern,
author) is himself shrouded in mystery and the second half of this dissertation investigates the
ways in which this enigmatic author was imagined and developed into a number of plausible
quasi-historical figures by his Ottoman readership.\(^{12}\) The pre-modern manuscript culture in
which knowledge was produced often provides confused, conflicting, or competing information
regarding the authorship of particular texts.

\(^{12}\) From here on, *al-mu'allif al-jadīd* (Tr. *mü'elif-i cedīd*) who is also known as ‘Alī Çelebi and Iznīḳī ‘Alī Bey,
among other variations of these names, will be referred to simply as ‘Alī Çelebi. By doing so, I accept the
convention of seventeenth-century Ottoman sources, but not necessarily any particular identification for this name
(of which there were many). See chapters 2 and 3 for a discussion of this subject. The only exception in this
dissertation is chapter 2, wherein the author will be referred to as *mü'elif-i cedīd* when it is appropriate to do so,
more specifically in dealing with the intermediary period between the time his writings circulated anonymously and
when the figure of ‘Alī Çelebi emerged in the manuscript tradition. These texts will be referred to as the AÇ-corpus,
or simply “the corpus” if the relevant section does not discuss other bodies of alchemical works such as the Jabirian
corpus.
Even more problematic is the fact that the activities of Ottoman alchemist-authors and of their social circles must be constructed based almost exclusively on the internal evidence revealed by their writings—the well-developed Ottoman bio-bibliographical literature is often silent when it comes to authors who, despite being celebrated by circles that practiced alchemy, were somewhat obscure figures within the learned hierarchy of the Empire. As for the countless owners, copyists, translators, and commentators of alchemical texts, most of them remain as names without faces, their lives and histories unknown or unnoticed. In short, the surviving bodies of evidence from the early modern Ottoman world do not permit us to craft the kind of in-depth historical narratives centered on individual alchemists or even on specific circles of alchemical learning grounded at particular localities, such as those that have been written for the late seventeenth-century Habsburg Empire.

This is not intended as a defeatist statement, but rather as one that serves to establish realistic parameters for the present chapter, the first half of which is concerned with providing an overview of the Ottoman alchemical literature and will attempt to historically contextualize the stages of its development, starting with its humble beginnings in the late fifteenth and spectacular blossoming after the second half of the sixteenth centuries. My main argument in this section is that, although the transmission of alchemical knowledge into the Ottoman world was part of a wider transmission of knowledge in almost all branches of the sciences, the kinds of Ottoman alchemical texts that appeared in rapid succession in the late 1500s suggest a more

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13 One such exception is Sohrābzāde Muṣṭafā Efendi (active in the mid-17th century), who owned a copy of the anonymous Ottoman alchemical work Meemmū‘atu’l-mücerrebāt (“Collection of Tested [Operations]”). Since he had served as the rüznamecī (account keeper) of the Ottoman administration in Egypt, Sohrābzāde Muṣṭafā is relatively well-known. For more information on him and the admittedly small number of other owners, copyists, and translators of works on alchemy about whom we have a historical record independent of alchemical manuscripts, see Chapter 3, fn. 24.

concerted effort to “vernacularize” the entire spectrum of alchemical traditions that were present in the Islamic world.\textsuperscript{15} I contend that this half-century of intense literary activity on the part of sixteenth and early seventeenth-century alchemists reflects, among other things, the internalization of Ottoman claims to supremacy in the Islamic world by Ottoman subjects who were not necessarily an integral part of the Empire’s power structure.

The second part of the chapter deals with a range of topics and themes, including the kinds of individuals and groups who produced, claimed to possess, or commonly believed to have access to alchemical knowledge, the relationship between these individuals or groups and the society at large, including those in positions of political power, and the popular attributions of individual wealth and prosperity to an expertise in alchemy. In order to organize these disparate themes within a single chapter, the discussion thereof will proceed from a single narrative arc focusing on a series of events that took place in the final years of Murâd IV’s rule (r. 1623-40), at a time when a reigning Ottoman sultan appears to have shown an unprecedented interest in practical alchemy. These events will provide us with an anchor at a particular moment in Ottoman history, which I will unpack and subsequently employ to comment on the larger issues at hand. Foremost among these issues is whether or not the popularization of practical alchemy from the late sixteenth century onward in the Ottoman world can be linked to the

\textsuperscript{15} By vernacularization, I mean not only the increasing use of the Turkish vernacular from the late sixteenth century onwards, but also the (re-)production of alchemical knowledge in the Ottoman world for a Rumi audience. This encompasses such practices as the ascription of anonymous treatises to individuals who would be best, or even only, recognized among the Rumis (such as the mystics Cemâleddîn Aḵsarâyî or Eşrefoğlu Rûmî), the mention of the Ottoman dynasty, and geographical references to locations in Anatolia. The Rumi audience itself is explicitly mentioned or addressed occasionally, as is the case in the Divân-ı hikmet: “A great sage of my stature came to this world, but, alas, he is mute/The pen of Lütfi resembles a sugarcane that offers sweets to the sons of Rûm (evlâd-ı Rûm).” Istanbul University MS TY 7016, 9b. Almost a century after its composition, these verses were to be interpreted by another Rumi alchemist, Meḥmed Nâcî, as a proof of his inheritance of ‘Alî Çelebi’s alchemical knowledge. Cf. below, fn. 379.
multifaceted crises (political, environmental, and above all economic) of the long-seventeenth century. Before any of this can be done, however, it is necessary to set the first order of our parameters by addressing exactly what “the Ottoman world” means within the context of this chapter.

*The Lands of Rum*

The expansion of a small Turcoman emirate on the borders of Byzantine Bithynia into a major regional power, and subsequently into a world empire, was perhaps the most significant political development in the late medieval Middle East and the Balkans. By the reign of Selīm I (r. 1508–20), when much of the Arab Middle East was brought into the Ottoman fold, both Rumelia (*Rūm-īli*) and western and central Anatolia, that is the “lands of Rum” (*Bilād-i Rūm*) had been undergoing profound demographic change for several centuries. The impact of the late medieval Turcoman migrations into Anatolia, “the original” *Rūm* (literally Rome, that is Byzantium), has been the subject of numerous studies.16 The historiographical debates about the ways in which the Turcomans interacted with the settled population of Byzantine Asia Minor aside, it can hardly be disputed that this populous corner of the Mediterranean that had once been predominantly Christian and Greek-speaking in the eleventh century, had experienced an historic religious and linguistic transformation in the late medieval period. The two transformations, religious and linguistic, rarely took place simultaneously, but the completion of one often led to

16 Among the more important are İsmail Hakkı Uzunçarşılı’s *Anadolu Beylikleri ve Akkoyunlu, Karakoyunlu Devletleri* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1937), Claude Cahen’s *La Turquie pré-ottomane* (Istanbul: Institut français d'études anatoliennes d'Istanbul, 1988), and Speros Vryonis Jr.’s *The Decline of Medieval Hellenism in Asia Minor and the Process of Islamization through the Fifteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971). Vryonis in particular has emphasized the social and economic break engendered by the nomadic Turcomans who settled in Byzantine Asia Minor in large numbers starting in the last quarter of the eleventh century.
the beginnings of the other: Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, the famous Moroccan traveler of the early fourteenth century, reveals the surprising presence of Muslim confraternities in numerous western Anatolian towns that had been occupied by various Turcoman dynasties only recently. In this early phase, one might expect much of the membership of these futuwwah brotherhoods to have been immigrants from other parts of Anatolia where Muslims had already been present for many generations—but this is not necessarily the case. A more explicit reference to conversion comes from a letter sent by the Patriarch of Constantinople Ioannes XIV Kalekas in 1338/39 to the Christians of Iznik (Nicaea), imploring them to remain steadfast in their faith and indicating the presence of crypto-Christians among the city’s nascent convert Muslim population. The contents of the letter are all the more striking, because Iznik had surrendered to besieging Ottoman forces less than a decade ago in 1331. Linguistic change is arguably more difficult to trace, yet there are historical accounts attesting not only bilingualism, but also Turkish monolingualism among the Christians of late medieval Anatolia. In many of its regions, the two currents of transformation eventually converged to affect greater change. By the turn of the fifteenth century, the process of Islamization and Turkification had irreversibly altered the religious and linguistic landscape. The Byzantine Emperor Manuel II Palaiologos (r. 1391-1425) had confronted this reality during an Ottoman military campaign in northern Anatolia in which he was participating as a vassal of Sultan Bāyezīd I (r. 1389-1402). In an emotional letter to his friend, the scholar Demetrios Kydones, he wrote about his futile efforts to inquire from the locals 17 Ibn Battuta, *Travels in Asia and Africa 1325-1354*, tr. H.A.R. Gibb (London: Broadway House, 1929), pp. 134-47.
19 Prominent among the former are the mixobarbaroi (half-barbarians, i.e. the children of Greek and Turkish parents) mentioned by, among others, Anna Komnene in the *Alexiad*, her admiring account of the reign of her father Alexios I Komnenos. Anna Komnene notes that at least one band of mixobarbaroi who served in a Turkish army were Greek-speakers (*hellēnizontes*), which means, given their presence among the Turkomans, that they were almost certainly bilingual. See A. Kambylis and D.R. Reinsch, *Annae Comnenae Alexias* (New York: De Gruyter, 2001), 15:5:2.
the names of the ruined cities that he witnessed in abundance, only to be met with silence or, worse, with “some barbaric and strange-sounding name.”

With the Ottomans’ crossing into Europe, first as allies of feuding Byzantine factions and soon thereafter as conquerors in the mid-1300s, another process of demographic change was set into motion in the Balkans, albeit one with a decisively different character. Unlike the piecemeal and protracted Turkish takeover of Anatolia, which, according to some scholars had contributed significantly to the process of Islamization in Anatolia, much of the southern Balkans had been swiftly occupied under a single dynasty. The Ottoman tax registers allow us to trace the increase of Muslim population over the course of the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries in the Balkans, where the phenomenon appears to be largely confined to the cities: two-thirds of the population of the city of Sofia, to give one example, was Muslim in 1520, whereas Muslims constituted merely six percent of the population in the province of Sofia. While Christians would remain as an absolute majority in Ottoman Europe till the end of Empire, in many Balkan urban centers great and small, Muslims outnumbered the Christians.

And yet the demographic change in Anatolia after the eleventh and in the Balkans after the fourteenth centuries tells only part of the story of the transformation of these two regions that formed the central lands of the Ottoman Empire, one that is impossible to quantify based on tax

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21 Foremost among them is Spyros Vryonis Jr. In addition to the abovementioned monograph Decline of Medieval Hellenism, also see, for a summary of his thoughts on this subject, “The Experience of Christians under Seljuk and Ottoman Domination, Eleventh to Sixteenth Century” in Michael Gervers and Ramzi Jibran Bikhazi, eds., Conversion and Continuity: Indigenous Christian Communities in Islamic Lands, Eighth to Eighteenth Centuries (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1990), especially pp. 201-02.
22 See Peter F. Sugar, Southeastern Europe under Ottoman Rule, 1354-1804 (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1993), p. 51 for the comparison of urban and rural Muslim populations in Sofia and other regions in 1520. For an updated and corrected version of the same table, as well as a discussion of the data, see Anton Minkov, Conversion to Islam in the Balkans: Kisve Bahasi Petitions and Ottoman Social Life, 1670-1730 (Leiden: Brill, 2004), pp. 48-51.
registers and similar administrative sources. Arguably more important, and, needless to say, fueled by the aforementioned linguistic and religious change, was a profound cultural transformation: in provincial towns, as well as the capital city of Istanbul itself, this meant not only the arrival or the emergence of a Turkophone elite who self-identified as “Rumis,” but also of new languages of learning (Arabic and Persian) and the rise of a learned culture that embraced, and contributed to, the intellectual heritage of the Islamic world. It is only through the intellectual and artistic activities of Rumi scholars, born and raised in territories where Greek (and to a lesser extent, in parts of Ottoman Europe, Church Slavonic and Latin) had once been the primary language of education and scholarship, both religious and secular, that we get glimpses of this momentous shift.

The Ottoman realm, like those of the neighboring Turcoman emirates, had of course attracted countless ‘ulemā, mystics, poets, and artisans from afar even in the days of Orḥān Bey (r. 1326-62). Originating from all parts the Islamic world, including central and eastern Anatolia, such men were drawn to the recently conquered territories in Bithynia, the southern Balkans, and eventually Istanbul itself, to take advantage of the patronage offered by the Ottoman elite. The consolidation of Ottoman rule also enabled, however, the emergence of “native” Muslim intellectuals in the cities and provinces conquered from the Byzantine Empire and various Balkan states, where the established Islamic tradition of learning on numerous bodies of

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23 On the Rumi identity, see especially Cemal Kafadar, “A Rome of One’s Own: Reflections on Cultural Geography and Identity in the Lands of Rum,” *Muqarnas* 24 (2007), pp. 7-25. The geographical specificity of the word “Rumi,” denoting the peoples of [Byzantine] Anatolia, pre-dated the arrival of Turcomans in this region—the latter’s adoption of this term being a result of their interactions with the Iranian and the Arab worlds. Within the first two centuries of the foundation of the Ottoman state, however, both “Rum” and “Rumi” would acquire a new meaning that referred to a cultural geography. As Kafadar notes, “Rum was a cultural space inhabited by a community that shared a literary language, Turkish,” rather clearly differentiated from the Iranian and Arabic cultural geographies.

24 Dāvud Kayserī (d. 1350), a fourteenth-century ‘ālim best known for his commentary of Ibn ‘Arabī’s *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* exemplifies such individuals: he hailed from the city of Kayseri in central Anatolia, an established center of Islamic learning by this period, and was regarded as a foundational figure by later Rumi ‘ulemā as he became the chief instructor at the medrese established by Sultan Orḥān (r. 1326-59) in Iznik.
knowledge were scarcely known and came to be practiced only in stages and in varying degrees. Among these “new” bodies of knowledge, was alchemy, in which Rumi scholars had not been particularly well-versed—as we will note shortly, the latter would begin to make important contributions to the existing Islamic alchemical tradition only in the sixteenth century. I must underline the “contributory” aspect here, despite many of its historiographical pitfalls, as what I am specifically interested in demonstrating is not so much that in the early modern period Zosimos or pseudo-Apollonios of Tyana were read more frequently in Arabic (and Turkish) than in Greek. It is rather that the Ottoman expansion into Byzantine Bithynia and the Balkans was mirrored by an “invisible” expansion of the Islamic cultural and intellectual world into societies that had once been altogether unfamiliar with that world’s scientific heritage.

Conversely, in the Arab lands occupied by the Ottomans, there was a more or less continuous and unbroken scholarly tradition and transmission of knowledge from the classical period into the early modern era—even the impact of as catastrophic an event as the Mongol invasions and the sack of Baghdad on the culture of learning has been convincingly challenged.

Needless to say, the intellectual traditions of the Arab lands were not somehow frozen in time;

25 One such example is the geographic and ethnographic knowledge of the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean, the Ottomans’ foray into which was the subject of a recent study, Giancarlo Casale’s *The Ottoman Age of Exploration* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2010). The conquest of these territories in the early sixteenth century, and the threat posed by the Portuguese, necessitated those Rumis who arrived in the region to set into motion what Casale has called a period of exploration (both physically and intellectually) of the Indian Ocean. Among the criticisms of this book, above all by Svat Soucek, is the knowledge-production its author seems to attribute to the Ottomans or, more properly, lack thereof according to Soucek. Even Casale’s harshest critics would agree, however, on just how little the learned Rumis knew about the Indian Ocean before the sixteenth century, in spite of the very centrality of these regions for successive generations of Muslim geographers, traders, and itinerant mystics. For Soucek’s review of Casale’s work, see Svet Soucek, “About the Ottoman age of exploration,” *Archivum Ottomanicum* 27 (2010), pp. 313-42.

26 Perhaps the best example to such continuity in the pre- and post-Mongol Islamic scientific learning is the case of astronomy and more specifically the astronomical school of Maragha. For Naṣraddîn Ṭūsî’s service and circle under Mongol patronage, see E. S. Kennedy “The Exact Sciences in Iran under the Seljuqs and Mongols,” in J.A. Boyle, ed., *The Cambridge History of Iran*, vol. 5 (Cambridge, 1968), pp. 659-79. On the historical significance of the Maraghah school within the wider history of sciences, see George Saliba, “The Role of Maraghah in the Development of Islamic Astronomy: A Scientific Revolution before the Renaissance,” *Revue de Synthèse*, 4 série, 3-4 (1987), pp. 361-73.
far from it, the Arab societies of the Middle East were experiencing political, demographic, and economic change in the early modern period, which, as one would expect, were reflected in the activities of their learned population. It is true, however, that this continuity of learning into the post-classical period, including the Ottoman era, meant that the cultural transformation of the Arab Middle East was rather subtle relative to the one experienced in western Anatolia and the southern Balkans. Accordingly, one of the parameters of the present chapter is that it focuses on the producers of knowledge in the field of alchemy, and related disciplines, in the lands of Rum rather than the entire “Ottoman world,” which, by the seventeenth century, extended from Algiers to Basra and from the Ukrainian Steppe to the Sudan. It goes without saying that I do not intend to thereby limit the sources for our inquiry, which are scarce to begin with, to those in Turkish alone, as the learned culture of the Ottoman Rumis was trilingual and some of the most significant alchemical writings of Rumi scholars had been composed in Arabic.  

Alchemical literature in the Lands of Rum

In evaluating the transmission of Arabic alchemical knowledge to the central lands of the Ottoman Empire, a distinction needs to be made between non-specialized works that either deal with this branch of knowledge partially or make references to it tangentially, and those that had

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27 The use of Persian, on the other hand, by Rumi alchemist-authors was limited, but alchemical works in this language were both read in the central lands of the Ottoman Empire and a number of Ottoman works on alchemy, such as ‘Alī Çelebi’s *Sirr ar-rabbānī* had been translated into Persian. A copy of this translation is presently found in Konya MS 4173—this MS was rather significantly among the collections of the municipal library of Van before the consolidation of provincial manuscript libraries (Van MS 80 according to the library’s stamp on f. 2b). It hardly needs to be stated that Persian speakers would have been numerous in Van, considering the city’s geographical proximity to Iran proper, or that this city’s learned Muslim population in particular could be considered part of the larger Iranian cultural world in the medieval and early modern periods for the same reason.
been written on theoretical and practical alchemy. Among the former, the impact of Sufi literature for spreading an awareness of the art must have been substantial, as some of the most widely-read mystical writings make frequent use of alchemical imagery. Other genres, most notably the Ottoman taṣnīf al-ʿulūm literature (“classification of sciences”), as well as the translations and adaptations of older works concerning natural philosophy, also mention the “science of alchemy” (ʿilm al-kīmyāʾ) as early as the fifteenth century. The Mevžūʿatu ʿulūm ("Subject matters of the sciences") by Aḥmed ibn Muṣṭafā Ṭāşıkprīzāde (d. 1561), who is better known for his biographical dictionary of Ottoman ʿulemā and mystics, is a case in point. Within this voluminous work on the classification of all religious and natural sciences, alchemy is given one of the more substantial treatments, for which Ṭāşıkprīzāde is tellingly apologetic. Ṭāşıkprīzāde’s description of the science of alchemy appears to be based on an eclectic array of

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28 It should be noted that the distinction between “theoretical” and “practical” alchemy is not one that is explicitly made by the Ottoman (or indeed earlier Islamic) alchemical texts: as a general rule, the majority of shorter treatises are concerned with practical or operational alchemy, while the more extensive works almost always include a theoretical section. The conceptual distinction between the two, however, is acknowledged not only in alchemical literature, but also many other branches of science, including medicine and astronomy. Thus ʿilmī or naẓarī (“theoretical”) knowledge is consistently distinguished from ʿamalī (“practical”) knowledge as they apply to a particular science. The origin of the distinction can be traced to Greek philosophy, more specifically between theoretikos (of which naẓarī is a literally translation) and praktikos (ʿamalī). For the use of these two concepts in the Arabic translations of Greek medical texts in particular, see C.H.M. Versteegh, Greek Elements in Arabic Linguistic Thinking (Leiden: Brill, 1977), p. 105.

29 The Maṣnāvī of Jalāladdīn Rūmī is perhaps the best known example, although it is important to bear in mind that it merely follows a well-established literary convention by using alchemical imagery to such effect. For a discussion of the Maṣnāvī and alchemy, see Kathryn V. Johnson, “Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī’s use of alchemical imagery,” Islamic Culture 70, no. 1 (1996), pp. 1-25. Perhaps more influential were the textually and orally transmitted hagiographic material in which Muslim holy men perform alchemical miracles. The Islamic hagiographic material is particularly rich in such displays of transformative power, wherein the holy man achieves feats such as transmuting pebbles into precious stones or sand into gold effortlessly. While Ottoman-period saint’s lives contain many examples of this, an earlier text, that of the life of Aḥmad-e Jām, is the most remarkable in that more than two dozen of this saint’s miracles was some sort of transmutation. See Heshmat Moayyad and Franklin Lewis, trans., The Colossal Elephant and His Spiritual Feats: Shaykh Ahmed-e Jām, The Life and Legend of a Popular Sufi Saint of 12th century Iran (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Publishers, 2004).

30 The title of this work’s Arabic original is Miṣḥāš as-saʿāda wa-miṣḥāš as-siyāda (“The Key of Happiness and the Lamp of Excellence”). Like Ṭāşıkprīzāde’s Shaqāʿiq an-nuʾmānīya, which had been translated into Turkish by Mecdī within the author’s lifetime, the Miṣḥāš as-saʿāda would also be translated, albeit with the efforts of Ahmed Ṭāşıkprīzāde’s son Kemāleddīn Mecdī. The encyclopedia is thus better known with the title of this Turkish translation, Mevzūʿatu ʿulūm, whose first print edition appeared in 1895.

31 Aḥmed Ṭāşıkprīzāde, Mevzūʿatu ʿulūm (Istanbul: İkdam Matbaası, 1313/1895-96), vol. 1, p. 373.
earlier sources, as there is little in the way of his own contemporary observation. More specifically, there are some similarities between Ṭāşköprüzāde and the relevant section on alchemy in Ibn Khaldūn’s *Muqaddima*, although it is possible that these stem from common sources and not the former’s knowledge of the *Muqaddima*, whose availability in Istanbul before the turn of the seventeenth century is uncertain. Later, some of Ibn Khaldūn’s specific arguments against the possibility of metallic transmutation through human art (most famously that this would have destroyed the socio-economic order of the world established by God, who had created gold and silver in rare qualities for this very purpose) would become known all-too-well and consequently elicit some responses from Ottoman alchemists.

As for specialized works on the subject of alchemy, the surviving manuscript evidence suggests three overlapping periods of literary activity by learned Rūmis, characterized by, in chronological order, the circulation and reproduction of earlier texts; the appearance of abridgements and syntheses thereof; the composition of commentaries and new works in Arabic, Turkish, and Persian by Rumi alchemist-authors. From the early fourteenth through the fifteenth

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32 Ṭāşköprüzāde’s tripartite categorization of all alchemists into mercury-sulfurists, balancers, and the experimenters is, however, intriguing. The first group refers to those who attempted to recreate and hasten the natural processes from which precious metals were believed to originate: this entailed the bringing together of sulfur and mercury, the quintessential versions of which are the roots of all metallic bodies according to Jabirian alchemy. The second group refers to Jabirian alchemists in particular, the balancers (*mawāżinī*, literally “scale makers”), who calculated the weights of four accidental natures (hotness, coldness, dryness, and moistness) in substances to manipulate them accordingly. The last group of alchemists, whose description in the *Mawḍū‘at* I have rendered as “the experimenters,” used, according to Ṭāşköprüzāde, all sorts of vegetable and animal substances to create the elixir by trial and error, without any particular attention to the weights of natures or indeed the ways in which metals came into being in nature. It is important to note that the use of vegetable and especially animal parts was an important innovation of the Jabirian corpus, although both the writings from this corpus and later Jabirian alchemists would emphatically criticize attempts to create the elixir without a knowledge of the “weights” of natures. Thus, while Ṭāşköprüzāde’s sources on this matter remain unknown, it is possible that this passage reflects his own understanding of various groups of alchemists in the sixteenth-century Ottoman world. For the relevant section see ibid., vol. 1, p. 372.


34 ʿOsmān Bīlānī, an eighteenth-century alchemist, turns Ibn Khaldūn’s argument against the possibility of metallic transmutation on its head and notes that the science of alchemy must be kept as a secret it because, otherwise, “no one would need anyone else…and this world would fall into disorder” (*kimse kimseye ihtiyâci kalmayub…bu kâ’inât fesâda varurdu*). Istanbul University MS TY 7025, 3a-b. For this argument, see below, fn. 109.
centuries, certain Arabic classics appear to have circulated in the nascent Ottoman world: a handful of surviving manuscripts from this period, the earliest of which is a copy of the Kitāb kashf ar-rumūz (“The Book of the Unveiling of Symbols”) by the tenth-century Iraqi alchemist Ibn Waḥshiyya – better known today for his treatise “Nabatean Agriculture” – suggest that Arabic alchemical works may have found a limited audience. In the absence of early ownership notes, it is of course impossible to ascertain exactly when these manuscripts were first available in the lands of Rum. For this very reason, a library inventory from the turn of the sixteenth century is of particular importance.

The inventory in question had been compiled by Ḥayreddīn Ḥızır ‘Aṭūfī (d. 1541), a Rumi polymath who had served at the Topkapı Palace during the reign of Bāyezīd II (r. 1481-1512). It was by the order of this sultan that a list of manuscripts at the Topkapı Palace had been prepared in 1503. As one of the earliest such library inventories from the central lands of the Ottoman Empire, the document is of extraordinary historical significance — and the two folios that contain a list of alchemical writings that were part of this collection allow us a unique glimpse at the kinds of works that were available, albeit to an admittedly exclusive readership, in Istanbul, just fifty years after the Ottoman conquest of the city.

The list includes some two-dozen alchemical works in eleven manuscripts, the overwhelming majority of which are in Arabic. With at least five individual titles, the Jabirian

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35 The fourteenth-century manuscript in question is Konya MS Yusufağa 4887, which contains a copy of Ibn Waḥshiyya’s Kitāb Kashf ar-rumūz which had been completed in H. 707/1307-1308.

36 The original, and sole surviving copy, of the inventory is currently among the collections of the Hungarian National Library (Budapest MS Török F. 59). I am indebted to my colleague Nükhet Varlık for drawing my attention to this invaluable source. The inventory in general, and the literary works therein in particular, have been the subject of a recent article. See İsmail E. Erünsal, “Türk Edebiyatı Tarihinin Arşiv Kaynakları 6: 909/1503 Tarihi DeFTER-i KÜTÜB,” Türk İli Bilgisi Arşivlerini (2008), 203-19.

corpus is the most represented among these.\textsuperscript{38} Other notable items include the writings of two Andalusian sages, the famous poem \textit{Shudhūr adh-dhahab} (“The Nuggets of Gold”) of Ibn Arfa’ Ra’s (d. 1197) and the \textit{Kitāb Rutbat al-ḥakīm} (“The Book of Rank of the Wise”), invariably ascribed to Maslamah al-Majritī (d. 1008) in its manuscript tradition, but about whose authorship doubts have been raised by modern scholarship.\textsuperscript{39} Treatises attributed to two pre-Islamic authorities were also found in this modest collection, namely to Hermes (Hurmus) and Zosimos (Risimos), while a third title, \textit{Kitāb mawāzin al-ahjār} (“The Book of Balances of Stones”), is properly speaking a part of the Jabirian corpus, but claims to preserve the teachings of the late antique sage Balīnās/Apollonius of Tyana.\textsuperscript{40}

The presence of several alchemical treatises bearing the names of Ibn Sīnā (d. 1037) and Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad al-Ghazālī (d. 1111), two great Muslim thinkers whose supposed interest in alchemy was contentious among the scholars of the Islamic world for different reasons, is also noteworthy.\textsuperscript{41} Ibn Sīnā’s refutation of the possibility of metallic transmutation was a source of infamy from the point of view of the late medieval and early modern Islamic


\textsuperscript{40} Budapest MS Török F. 59, fol. 150a.

\textsuperscript{41} Ibid., fol. 150a. Ibn Sīnā’s alchemical treatises were found in two separate manuscripts, the second of which also contained a copy of his treatise on phonetics (\textit{Risālah [asbāb] ḥudūth al-ḥurūf}). For a long time known only in their Latin translations, the Arabic alchemical writings ascribed to Ibn Sīnā were “re-discovered” in Istanbul’s manuscript libraries by Julius Ruska, who dismissed the possibility of their authenticity on account of Ibn Sīnā’s position on metallic transmutation. J. Ruska, “Die Alchemie des Avicennas,” \textit{Isis} 21 (1934), pp. 14-51. Ahmed Ateş was the first scholar to argue for Ibn Sīnā’s authorship of at least one alchemical treatise. A. Ateş, “İbn Sina, Risâlat al-İksir,” \textit{Türkiyat Mecmuası} 10 (1953), pp. 27-44. Having gathered an impressive array of evidence from its extant manuscript copies (including one dated 588/1192-93), Ateş noted that the contents of this particular treatise reveal that its author was concerned with tinctures and giving color to metals through the “elixir,” whose powers to that effect had never been doubted by Ibn Sīnā. Another argument of Ateş, namely that Ibn Sīnā might have renounced his interest in alchemy later in life, was also espoused by H. E. Stapleton, and more recently by George Anawati. See H. E. Stapleton et al., “Two alchemical treatises attributed to Avicenna,” \textit{Ambix} 10 (1962), pp. 41-83; G. C. Anawati, “Avicenne et l’alchimie,” in Oriente e Occidente nel medioevo: filosofia e scienze. Atti del Convegno dal 9 al 15 aprile 1969 (Rome: Accademia Nazionale dei Linzei, 1971), pp. 285-341. See fn. 30 below for an Ottoman proponent of the same idea.
world’s alchemists: following the lead of the Seljukid vizier and renowned alchemist
Mu’ayyadaddin at-Ṭughrā’ī (d. 1121), who had criticized Ibn Sīnā in his Kitāb Ḥaqā’iq al-
istikhashed fi’il-kīmyā’ (“Book of the Truths of Evidence concerning Alchemy”), Ottoman
alchemists frequently used Ibn Sīnā as an example for men of knowledge with no wisdom.42
Complicating this image were several alchemical treatises attributed to the Persian philosopher.
Known for a long time only in their Latin translations, the Arabic originals of these treatises
were re-discovered in manuscript libraries in Istanbul in the early twentieth century—there is
conclusive evidence, however, that at least some Ottoman alchemists were well aware of their
existence.43 As for Ghazālī, his biography indicates that he did not condone those who
practiced alchemy, but the title of his popular Persian work on the religious sciences, Kīmyā-i
sa’ādat (“Alchemy of Happiness”), may have contributed to the appearance of alchemical
writings bearing his name. Evidently, some of these writings were circulating by the fourteenth
century, and very possibly earlier, as Ibn Khaldūn had noted that they were apocryphal.44

The only mystery posed by the inventory of books at the Topkapı Palace library is the
mention of an otherwise unknown work, Bostānu’l hikmet (“The Garden, or Orchard, of
Wisdom”), which had been composed in Turkish (bi’t-turkiyya) and solitarily occupied a single

42 An anonymous Turkish alchemical poem attributed to ‘Alī Çelebi, for example, mentions him in its opening lines,
noting that “Ibn Sīnā, with all his merits, never knew the science of the elixir” (Ibn Sīnā bū deñlü fażlı ile, ilm-i
iksīri bilmedi aslā). Istanbul University MS TY 7016, Divan-i hikmet. 2b: 1. 7. The couplet immediately preceding
this one rather tellingly calls those who are unable to see the light of alchemy’s divine power, “the blind [ones].” Ibn
Sīnā is similarly used as an archetypal figure, one who is oblivious to esoteric knowledge, by one of the most
prolific Sufis of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century, Ismā’īl Ḥaḳḳī Bursevī (d. 1725): “because he was
ignorant of the science of alchemy, Ibn Sīnā denied [its possibility]… he did not realize that the [relationship]
between the science of the elixir and the philosophical sciences (‘ulūm-u ḥikemiyye) is just like that between the
science of mysticism (ilm-i tasawvuf) and the religious sciences (‘ulūm-u resmiyye). Ismā’īl Ḥaḳḳī Bursevī,
43 In the late eighteenth century, more than a hundred years before Ruska’s abovementioned re-discovery, ‘Osmān
Bilâni wrote: “in his early days, sheikh Ibn Sīnā rejected this science, but in his later years composed a treatise
accepting its possibility.” Risâle-i el-Hacc ‘Osmân Bilâni, Istanbul University MS TY 7025, fol. 47a.
No author is indicated, and it is difficult to say whether or not the book in question was an original composition. As one would expect, the rather generic title, with all its variations (e.g. būstān [ḥadīqat, rawḍat, jannat, firdaws] al-ḥikmah), has been given to numerous works throughout the long history of scholarship in the Islamic world. It is, however, known to have been associated with only one alchemical work, the collection of poems known as the Firdaws al-ḥikmah, whose authorship was commonly ascribed to the first of Muslim alchemist-authors, the Umayyad prince Khālid ibn Yazīd. Since the Bostānu’l ḥikmet is lost, we can only speculate if it was a translation of the Firdaws al-ḥikmah—if this is indeed the case, a comparison of the latter work with the large number of Turkish alchemical poems that suddenly appear in the late sixteenth century might reveal whether or not certain parts of the Bostānu’l ḥikmet survived as individual poems.

That a Turkish work on alchemy existed as early as the fifteenth century is not the only revelation to emerge from ‘Aṭūfī’s catalogue. Just as important is the intriguing absence of a figure that would come to be recognized as one of the greatest authorities of the art among later

45 Budapest MS Török F. 59, fol. 149b.
46 A copy of is found in Körprü MS 924. A selection from this work, under the same title, is ascribed to a certain ‘Aws ibn al-Mundhir in Konya MS 228, fols. 121a-138b. Judging by his family name, this figure may have been a Lakhmid prince, although I was unable to find anyone from the ibn al-Mundhir family with this first name. There was, however, a non-dynastic ruler of Hīra in the fourth century, ‘Aws ibn Qallam al-Lihyānī, which might explain the confusion, if this is indeed one. See Irfan Shahīd, Byzantium and the Arabs in the Fifth Century (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1989), p. 366, fn. 156.
47 The vernacularization of Arabic and Persian alchemical knowledge, not in the broad sense that this science was produced and reproduced in an Ottoman Rumi context as vernacularization has been defined above, but in that the Turkish vernacular was used to compose alchemical works, indicates a widening of interest in alchemy that was no longer limited to the learned elite who could both understand and write difficult texts in Arabic and/or Persian. In the same period, for example, the relatively few number of lettrist (i.e. ‘ilm al-ḥurūf) texts in the Turkish vernacular constitute a contrast against the body of Arabic texts circulating especially in Istanbul. On the conceptualization of ‘ilm al-ḥurūf as a science for and by “the elite of the elite,” see Matthew S. Melvin-Koushki, “The Quest for a Universal Science: The Occult Philosophy of Şā’īn al-Dīn Turka Isfahānī (1369-1432) and Intellectual Millenarianism in Early Timurid Iran” (Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University, 2012), passim, but especially pp. 333 and 338. I do not mean to suggest that alchemy was not an elitist branch of knowledge within the Ottoman world, of course, which would be a misleading statement. It was rather that alchemy was extensive enough to accommodate many shades of theoretical and practical expertise, some of which was espoused by the elite, while others were not: the Jabirian “theory of the balance” is a perfect example of the former. The “minor operation” (that is the transmuting metals without the stone) was considered, by the same group, as a lesser path and it is clear from the descriptions thereof that this refers primarily to what we might call artisanal alchemy. See Chapter 2, pp. 88-89.
Ottoman alchemists, namely the Mamluk sage Aydamur al-Jaldakî (d. 1342). Not only does the number of Jaldakî’s works in manuscript libraries found throughout the former Ottoman territories presently rival that of works from the Jabirian corpus, but the Topkapi Palace library itself also includes some of his writings.\(^{48}\) I am inclined to believe that two developments had led to the acceptance of Jaldakî as an authoritative figure by Ottoman alchemists: one was the conquest of Syria and Egypt in 1516-17. Admittedly, learned Ottomans visited, and sought knowledge in, these two lands long before 1517, just as learned Egyptians and Levantines were drawn to the newly conquered territories in Asia Minor and the Balkans almost from the very foundation of the Ottoman state. Be that as it may, it can hardly be denied that cultural interaction between the lands of Rum and Egypt in particular was facilitated to a great extent by the annexation of the Mamluk Sultanate. Since he had been a resident of both Cairo and Damascus, we may expect all the works of Jaldakî to have been available in these two cities.\(^{49}\) The other development that would have contributed to Jaldakî’s popularity in the lands of Rum is the appearance of ‘Alî Çelebi. As one of the first, and decidedly the foremost, Ottoman alchemists, ‘Alî Çelebi’s claim of a special connection with Jaldakî must have facilitated an interest in the writings of the Mamluk sage that simply did not exist in the early years of the sixteenth century. These two developments are also to some extent linked with one another: the annexation of the Mamluk Sultanate had led to a re-positioning—at least in the imagination of some learned Rumis—of the cultural sphere of Rum from the peripheries to the center of the Islamic world. By claiming to have inherited Jaldakî’s authority and, as we shall see observe

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\(^{48}\) *Sharkh Risālat ash-shams ilā hilāl* in Topkapi MS Revan 1763, copied in 1659; *Durrat al ghawwas wa kanz al ikhtisas* in Topkapi MS Emanet Hazinesi 1104, copied in 1708.

\(^{49}\) The Turkish manuscript libraries today house more than a hundred identified books and treatises of Jaldakî—the great majority of the dated copies are indeed from the last quarter of the sixteenth century or later. This could, however, also be explained by the growing middle class in urban centers and the corresponding increased demand in books. The book culture of early modern cities of Rum has not received sufficient scholarly attention to date, but a study for the city of Cairo does exist: Nelly Hanna, *In Praise of Books: A Cultural History of Cairo’s Middle Class, Sixteenth to the Eighteenth Century* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2003), see especially pp. 79-91.
later, to have even superseded it, ‘Alī Çelebi mirrored the Ottoman claims to supremacy in the aftermath of its take-over of the Arab Middle East in the sixteenth century.

Whether or not there were alchemical works in the Turkish vernacular in the fifteenth century besides the Bostānu’l hikmet is difficult to establish. It is certain, however, that Rumi scholars were producing abridgements and syntheses of older Arabic and Persian texts through the sixteenth century, during which time a number of translations into Turkish also appeared.⁵⁰

The sources of these vernacularization efforts were some of the most important figures in the Islamic tradition, including Jābir ibn Ḥayyān, known in Europe as Geber and whose historicity has been the subject of intense debate among the scholars of Arab alchemy, the Persian philosopher Muḥammad Rāzī (d. 932), the abovementioned authors Ibn Waḥshiyya, Majritī, Ṯuḥrā’ī, and Ibn Arfa’ Ra’s, the Egyptian Ibn Umayl at-Tamīmī (second half of the tenth century), the thirteenth-century alchemist Abū’l-Qāsim al-‘Irāqī, and of course the great Jaldakī.⁵¹ Through the latter’s numerous works, but especially his Kitāb al-Burhān fī asrār ‘īlm al-mizān (“The Book of Proof for the Secrets of the Science of Balance”) and Kitāb Nihāyat at-ṭalab fī sharḥ al-Muktasab (“The Book of the End of Search for the Explanation of [al-‘Irāqī’s book] al-Muktasab”), which include extensive quotations from the writings of earlier authorities, the alchemists of Rum gained immediate access to the vast Greco-Islamic alchemical tradition.⁵²

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⁵⁰ Rāzī’s Kitāb al-asrār (“The Book of Secrets”) had found a partial translation and adaption in the Mecmū’atū’l mücerrerbāt (“The Collection of Tested [Operations]”), although the first known copies of the latter date from the early seventeenth century. See Chapter 3, fn. 24. Ibn Waḥshiyya’s Kitāb ’Uṣūl al-kabīr (“The Book of Great Principles”) on the other hand had certainly been translated into Turkish at some point in the sixteenth century: Vienna MS AF 327, fols. 56b-78b. Another copy of this Turkish translation is found in Bouwman MS Turk 140, fols. 1b-64a, where the translator is named as Sheikh ʿOsmān Ṣārūḥānī, apparently a Rumi mystic and/or alchemist. The latter manuscript also contains Turkish translations of alchemical works attributed to Hermes and Jābir.

⁵¹ One of the first modern studies, however brief, on Jaldakī was done by Eric J. Holmyard, “Aidamir al-Jildaki,” Iraq 4:1 (Spring, 1937), pp. 47-53. As Corbin would later show, the correct vocalization of his geographical epithet is Jaldakī, and not Jildakī, as he was a native of Jaldak, a town located eighteen kilometers to the north of Mashhad in Khorasan, see Henry Corbin, Histoire de la philosophie islamique (Paris: Gallimard, 1986), p. 453.

⁵² The latter work, whose full title is occasionally given as Nihāyat at-ṭalab fī sharḥ al-Muktasab fī zirā’at adh-dhahab, has been the subject of a Ph.D. dissertation (hereafter NT): Manuchehr Taslimi, “An Examination of the
By the middle of the sixteenth century then, the writings of these and other alchemist-authors of the Islamic world were already circulating in some of the urban centers of western Anatolia and the Balkans, as well as Istanbul, where the availability of such works, to say nothing about their accessibility, had been limited before the establishment of Ottoman rule. It is worth noting that Leo Africanus, the famous sixteenth-century Moroccan whose description of North Africa was among the most authoritative sources on this region in Europe, had enumerated the texts that were widely read by the alchemists of Fez in his time: among them, we find Jābir (Geber), Ṭughrāʾī (Attogrehi), and a Granadan alchemist who had written an important alchemical poem “of whose commentator is a most learned Mamluk from Damascus” (quam commentatus est Mammaluccus doctissimus patria Damascenus). The latter two alchemists are

‘Nihāyat al-Ṭalab’ and the Determination of its Place and Value in the History of Islamic Chemistry,” University of London, 1954.

53 My intention here is not to suggest that the Byzantines had no interest in, or access to, Arabic learning, as such a statement would be patently false: among the Arabic works that were translated into Greek during the so-called Macedonian renaissance was the remarkable dream-book known as “the Oneirocriticon of Achmet,” which had been compiled from an array of Arabic sources on dream interpretation, possibly in the reign of Leo VI (r. 886-912). See Maria V. Mavroudi, A Byzantine Book on Dream Interpretation: The Oneirocriticon of Achmet and Its Arabic Sources (Leiden: Brill, 2002). Such interest was of course in no way limited to the science of dream interpretation. In the field of astrology, excerpts from the works of the late eighth-century Persian Jewish sage Māshāʾallāh ibn Athar had been translated into Greek by the early eleventh century. See David Pingree, “The Byzantine Translations of Māshāʾallāh on Intergalactic Astrology” in Paul Magdalino and Maria V. Mavroudi, eds., The Occult Sciences in Byzantium (Geneva: La pomme d’or, 2006), p 236-38. More famous yet is the scholarly sojourn of Gregorios Choniades (d. 1302) to Persia to further his knowledge of astronomy. Upon his return from Persia, he would translate a number of Persian astronomical works into Greek and establish an observatory in the city of Trebizond. See David Pingree, “Gregory Choniades and Palaeologan Astronomy,” Dumbarton Oaks Papers 18 (1964), pp. 135-60. Still later, the methods of Choniades’ much younger contemporary Manuel Moschopoulos for creating magic squares appear to have been informed, albeit indirectly, by the works of the great Egyptian occultist ʿAḥmad al-Būnī. For the Buniyan connection of Moschopoulos’ magic squares, see N. L. Biggs, “Roots of Combinatorics,” Historia Mathematica 6 (1979), pp. 118-36. On Moschopoulos’ life and his involvement in Constantinopolitan politics in particular, see I̧hor Ševčenko, “The Imprisonment of Manuel Moschopoulos in the Year 1305 or 1306,” Speculum 27 (1952), No. 2, pp. 133-57. Obviously, more examples can be added to the ones just cited—it is nonetheless interesting that in the field of alchemy, Byzantine scholars’ point of reference remained the Alexandrian school, with the only known instance of translations from Arabic alchemical writings into Greek having taken place in early fourteenth century southern Italy, perhaps through the intermediary of Latin, this is the Anonyme de Zuretti ou L’art sacré et divin de la chrysopée par un anonyme, ed. and tr. Andrée Colinet, Les alchimistes grecs, vol. X (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2000). My point stands, however, that the transition of the late Byzantine world into the Ottoman Rumi one over the course of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries precipitated a sustained and “institutionalized” introduction of Islamic scientific traditions on all branches of knowledge into a new geographical space whose familiarity with the former had been limited and sporadic in the preceding centuries.

no other than Ibn Arfa‘ Ra’s and Jaldakī. The latter alchemist had indeed written a major commentary on the former’s *Shudhūr adh-dhahab*, and both the poem and the commentary were being read by Ottoman scholars in the lifetime of Leo Africanus, along with the works of the other alchemists he had cited. "In other words, the sixteenth-century Ottoman world had already become a fertile ground for the production of alchemical knowledge through the transmission of alchemical texts of the highest repute in other, and more “established,” parts of the Islamic world. These texts, moreover, represented the entire spectrum of the extant alchemical literature, ranging from those that adopted the cosmology and “the science of the balance” (*‘ilm al-mīzān*) advanced by the Jabirian corpus, to the allegorical-spiritual (Ibn Umayl and Ibn Arfa‘ Ra’s) and the “technical” (Rāzī).

It was therefore not altogether unexpected that this same period would witness the beginnings of a distinctly Ottoman tradition of alchemical literature, composed in Arabic, Persian, and Turkish as befitting the Empire’s trilingual learned culture. The appearance, in the early decades of the sixteenth century, of two treatises in Arabic about alchemy by an Ottoman jurist had come on the heels of a wider circulation of older alchemical works in the Ottoman world. The religious scholar in question was Muṣṭafā Bostān Efendi ibn Pîr Meḥmed ‘Alî (d. 1569). Originally from Tire in the province of Aydın in western Asia Minor, Bostān Efendi was a product of the scholarly circles of Istanbul, where he studied under some of the greatest Rumi ‘ulemā of his day, including Muḥyiddīn Fenāʿīzāde, Aḥmed Kemālpaṣazāde, and Muḥyiddīn

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55 This is Jaldakī’s *Ghāyat as-surūr fī sharh Dīwān ash-shudhūr* (“[The Book of] Delightful Goal for the Commentary of the *Dīwān ash-shudhūr*”), excerpts from which also circulated under various titles. The numerous manuscript copies of the commentary and its excerpts found in Istanbul, as well as in a number of provincial libraries, attest both to the authoritativeness of Jaldakī and to the popularity of Ibn Arf’a Rā’s’ alchemical poem in the early modern Ottoman world. Following Jaldakī’s lead, ‘Alî Çelebi also wrote a major commentary on this alchemical poem, the *Tawālī’ al-budūr fī sharh ash-Shudhūr* (“The Risings of the Full Moons for the Commentary of [the *Dīwān* ash-Shudhūr*”). Its oldest surviving copy, Nuruosmaniye MS 3628, is dated 997/1588-89.
Çivizâde.\(^{56}\) He would hold increasingly prestigious posts: a teaching position at the \textit{medrese} of Molla ‘Arab in his native Tire, the judgeship of Bursa, and culminating in the chief military judgeship (\(każasker/qädi ’l-‘askar\)), first of Anadolu and later of Rumeli, two of the highest ranking positions within the educational-judicial hierarchy (‘ilmiyye) of the Empire.\(^{57}\) With respect to his fame and importance, we need not say much more than that Ebû’s-Su‘ûd Efendi, who served for three decades as the \textit{sheikhu’l-islām} under Süleymān I and Selīm II, had led the funeral prayers for Bostān Efendi, whose descendants, known as the Bostānzâdes, would also occupy important positions within the religious estate of the Empire.

What makes the two alchemical works attributed to Bostān Efendi particularly interesting is the fact that there is no need to rely exclusively on their respective manuscript traditions for this ascription—the Ottoman biographical sources also confirm his interest in alchemy and the name of one his treatises. This is the \textit{Hazīnat al-asrār wa ḥaqq al-astār} (“[The Book of] the Treasure of Secrets and the Truth of Veils”), which happens to be the longer and more comprehensive of the two works he had composed on the subject. It is very likely that the second, shorter, treatise, the \textit{Najāt al-ḥbāb wa-tuḥfat dhawī al-albāb} (“[The Book] of the Salvation of Friends and a Gift [for] the Discerning”) had been written along with the \textit{Hazīnat al-asrār}, for in the latter Bostān Efendi mentions the names of both treatises and states that he had made a copy, in his own hand, of each and donated them to the \textit{medrese} of Sultan Selīm (\(katabtu-humā bi-khaṭṭī wa-waqaftu-humā li ’l-madrasati ’s-salīm shāhīyya\)).\(^{58}\) Although neither


\(^{57}\) Judging from the number of extant manuscript copies of his works (İstanbul University MS AY 6081, Süleymaniye MS Carullah 1566, Çorum MS 2908/3, and a handful of others), as well as references thereof in the writings of later Ottoman alchemists, Bostān Efendi’s influence appears to have been rather limited. One of the few later alchemists to mention him at all is Muḥammad al-Maqdiṣî, who composed a treatise on alchemy for Sultan Murād IV. The only surviving copy of this treatise is found in Princeton MS Garrett 1182Y.

\(^{58}\) Süleymaniye MS Bağdatlı Vehbi 2276, fol. 14b.
of these treatises cites the date of composition, the mention of the medrese of Sultan Selîm (I), which was completed in 1548-49 in the reign of his son Sûleyman, gives us a terminus ante quem. As such, the Najât al-aḥbāb and the Hazīnat al-asrār are the oldest surviving original compositions on alchemy by an Ottoman. Two earlier alchemical works by Molla ‘Arab (of Antakya, not to be confused by the Molla ‘Arab who had established the medrese in Tire where Bostân Efendi would teach) are in fact abridgements of Majritî's Rutbat al-hâkîm and of Jaldakî's al-Burhân.59

In his descriptions of alchemical operations, and especially of the cultivation of the elixir, Bostân Efendi refers to the classics, including Khālid ibn Yazîd, Jâbir, Ibn Umayl, and Jaldakî, in a manner consistent with the conventions of the genre, going back to the Jabirian corpus, wherein many operations are explained based on the authority of Greek alchemists such as Zosimos. His commentaries on numerous quotations of Jaldakî, Ibn Arfa’ Ra’s, and al-‘Irâqî, among others, once again confirm our previous observation about the circulation of such texts in the early sixteenth century Ottoman world. Unlike Jâbir or Jaldakî, however, Bostân Efendi does not claim a divinely-inspired expertise in the art, which sets him apart from not only these earlier alchemists, but also from the mystically inclined Ottoman practitioners of alchemy such as ‘Alî Çelebi and Meḥmed Nâcî.60

Bostân Efendi was followed almost immediately, and dramatically, by ‘Alî Çelebi. Since the last two chapters of this dissertation will deal with the figure of “the new author,” that is ‘Alî Çelebi, in detail, for the moment I will simply note that the corpus attributed to him marks the beginning of an intense literary activity in the field of alchemy. The corpus in its entirety, by all

59 Talkhîṣ ar-Rutbat al-ḥâkîm, Millet MS Ali Emiri Arabi 2833, fols. 8-23; Talkhîṣ al-Burhân, Kütahya Zeytinoğlu MS 631, fols. 66-117.
60 On these two authors’ claims, see below, Chapter 3, pp. 116-17 and 147-49.
indications, was not the work of a single author, but this suggests all the more that Jabirian alchemy had gained a following that is not attested in the Ottoman world until that time. The manuscript traditions of individual works from the AÇ corpus indicate that they reached a wide audience, first in the central lands of the Empire, then in the Arab provinces, and eventually throughout the Islamic world, from Morocco to India. \[^{61}\] Within the Ottoman Empire itself, they precipitated the writing of a large number of related works, from the Turkish translations and abridgements of the AÇ corpus to new compositions that were modeled on them, just as ‘Alī Çelebi had taken the Mamluk alchemist Jaldakī as a model.\[^{62}\]

The manuscript evidence, which is investigated in the third chapter, indicates that the greater part of the corpus dates to the third quarter of the sixteenth-century, with much of it having been completed before 1573. ‘Alī Çelebi had explicitly followed the lead of Jaldakī, by not only adopting his style and basing the subjects of his individual works on those composed by the Mamluk sage, but also suggesting similarities between his life story and that of Jaldakī. What we have here is not a translation project as such, in particular because much of the Ottoman AÇ corpus had been composed in Arabic, but rather a deliberate effort to emulate, adopt, and (at least according to the opinion of ‘Alī Çelebi himself) supplant the writings of Jaldakī.

Within the next three decades, the AÇ corpus was followed by the works of other Rumi alchemists, who similarly styled their works after the disparate alchemical traditions of the

\[^{61}\] See Chapter 3, pp. 120-29.

\[^{62}\] Among these Ottoman followers of ‘Alī Çelebi are the just mentioned Meḥmed Nācī, his contemporary Muṣṭafā Sirōzī, and the eighteenth-century alchemists el-Ḥācc ‘Oṣmān Biīlānī and Feyyāż Çatalcavī to name a few. The most complete copy of ‘Oṣmān Biīlānī’s writings is in Istanbul University MS TY 7025, although many other copies exist, including Ankara MS A 5735 and Bouwman MS Turk 186. While Biīlānī’s ideas on alchemy are not uninteresting, his works are more noteworthy for the unusually extensive and detailed autobiographical passages they contain. A native of the province of Aleppo, his statement that he sought individuals knowledgeable in alchemy in Istanbul and Bursa can be verified thanks to an Arabic work, the Tazkiyat an-nufūṣ wa tasfiyat al-qulūb, which he had copied in Istanbul in 1197/1782-83: Kütahya MS Zeytinoğlu 1041. The sole surviving copies of Sirōzī’s and Çatalcavī’s alchemical writings are in Süleymaniye MS Bağdatlı Vehbi 2276, fols. 1b-40b and Istanbul University MS TY 7026, fols. 2b-13b respectively.
Islamic world: the anonymous *Mecmū’atü’l-mücerrebāt* was a partial translation, with significant additions, of Rāzī’s *Kitāb al-asrār* (“The Book of Secrets”), which has been called a “laboratory manual” owing to its purely technical content and shun of symbolic language and even of *Decknamen*. Rather tellingly, the introduction of the *Mecmū’atü’l-mücerrebāt* pronounces that the work had been written so as to reveal the science of alchemy to the general public (*‘amm*) rather than just the initiated, a statement that would have been anathema to the author(s) of the AÇ corpus. Likely antedating the *Mecmū’atü’l-mücerrebāt*, and most certainly composed in the second half of the sixteenth century, were a large number of pseudepigraphal Turkish alchemical poems, some of which, ascribed to Sufis such as ‘Āşıkpaşa and Cemâleddin Aḵsarayî, are reminiscent of the Arabic poems of Khālid ibn Yazīd and Dhu’n-nūn that feature so prominently in the Islamic alchemical literature. Another Turkish poem, the *Kašîde-i Sîr-i Ṭâ-Hâ* (“The Poem of the Secret of Ṭâ-Hâ”), was ascribed to Şafiyuddîn Ardabîlî, the paternal ancestor of Shah İsmâ’îl, and is distinguished by its use of symbols and imagery resembling much earlier Arabic allegorical poems such as Ibn Umayl’s *magnum opus*, *Risâla ash-shams ilâ hilāl* (“The Letter of the Sun to the Crescent Moon”). The *Dîvân-i hikmet*, another, and much longer, Turkish poem written before 1600, was rather explicitly modeled on Ibn Irfa Ra’s’ *Shudhûr adh-dhahab*, both of which are organized according to the letters of the Arabic alphabet—some of the contents of the Turkish poem also closely follow the *Shudhûr*. Finally, the extensive Turkish commentary written for the *Sîr-ı Ṭâ-Hâ* draws heavily on the works of

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63 For one of the many scholarly studies that characterize Rāzī’s works *Kitāb al-asrār* and *Sirr al-asrār* (“The Secret of Secrets”) as such, see Donald R. Hill, “The Literature of Arabic Alchemy” in M.J.L. Young, J.D. Latham and R.B. Serjeant, eds., *Religion, Learning and Science in the ‘Abbasid Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 336-37. *Decknamen* refers to “cover names” that are used for ingredients and alchemical procedures in the literature, some of which were too well known to actually function as secret names, e.g. “the sun” for gold. Others are rarer and thus important for the occultization of knowledge, such as “the prince of China” for “eastern mercury.”

64 *Mecmū’atü’l-mücerrebāt*, Süleymaniye MS Hekimoğlu 541, f. 2b.

Jaldakī, who had himself written a commentary on the *Shudhūr*. It must be repeated that the bulk of this literary activity occurred between third quarter of the sixteenth and the first quarter of the seventeenth century, clearly a very significant period for the vernacularization of Arabic alchemical knowledge by Rumi scholars. By the early 1600s, the technical know-how of Ottoman alchemists was apparently sufficient to lead the anonymous author of the *Mecmū’ātî‘l-mücerrebāt* to omit an entire section on the tools and instruments necessary for distillation, “for these instruments…are well-known by the seekers [of alchemy] in every province.”

*Alchemists in the early Ottoman world and their audience*

The emergence of an Ottoman literature on alchemy in the lands of Rum had not taken place in a vacuum. To be sure, it not only “followed” but also co-existed with the (post-)Byzantine alchemical tradition that was based primarily on the Alexandrian alchemist-authors such as Zosimos and Stephanos, figures well-known to, and influential for, successive generations of Muslim alchemists. The exact nature of the interaction between the two traditions, however, the Alexandrian-Byzantine and the Islamic-Ottoman, are unfortunately lost to history. Similarly little understood is the role played by metallurgists and smiths in the nascent Ottoman world with respect to the reception, transmission, and adaptation of Islamic and more specifically Jabirian alchemy. Had there been artisan-alchemists among the smiths, the kinds of which are known to have played a significant role in the popularization of this branch of knowledge in Central and Western Europe in the early modern period?\(^67\) The handful of surviving treatises that

\(^{66}\) *Mecmū’ātî‘l-mücerrebāt*, f. 3b.

\(^{67}\) See for example the important contributions to this very subject by Pamela Smith’s *The Business of Alchemy: Science and Culture in the Holy Roman Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994) and Bruce Moran’s
were authored by Ottoman smiths and metallurgists make no mention of alchemical precepts.\textsuperscript{68}

The admittedly meager evidence from Ottoman alchemical works, on the other hand, is ambiguous. ‘Alī Çelebi, as the self-styled inheritor of Jaldakī, and the tradition of philosophical alchemy this figure represented, goes so far to state that “jewelers” (\textit{aṣ-ṣuyyāğhīn} [sic]) are the enemies of alchemists.\textsuperscript{69} ‘Alī Çelebi’s resentment clearly stemmed from the fact that jewelers were motivated by personal gain in their craft, which in any case allowed them a limited expertise in only the apparent properties of the metals. In contrast, the alchemist-philosophers were masters of both the apparent and the hidden qualities of all substances, and practiced their art so as to unlock the mysteries of creation and thereby know the creator in ways that even knowledgeable religious scholars could not. Other Ottoman practitioners of the art, such as ‘Oğmân Bîlânî, on the other hand, made little distinction between individuals with a shared interest in alchemy, attaching equal importance to operations attributed to alchemist-philosophers (e.g. Jābir and ‘Alī Çelebi), religious scholars (Aḥmad ad-Damanhūrī), or indeed jewelers (\textit{kuyumcu Agob}, “Agob the jeweler”).\textsuperscript{70}

Who were then the individuals responsible for the initial transmission of Jabirian alchemy to the lands of Rum? While one must avoid generalizations based on the glimpses of these historical agents, we can still make a number of observations. As one might expect, several important figures in the earliest history of Ottoman alchemy were scholars from other parts of the Islamic world who visited or settled within the lands of Rum. An early itinerant alchemist and scholar is ‘Azīzullāh ibn ‘Aṭāullah Hindī (the Indian), who wrote a treatise on the properties


\textsuperscript{68} Although it reveals nothing on this particular subject, a rare treatise on mining dated 1546 is worthy of a separate study in its own right despite its brevity. Hasan Efendi, \textit{Risāletü'l-m’aden}, Kastamonu MS 3571, fols. 2a-8b.

\textsuperscript{69} \textit{Sirr ar-rabbānī}, Millet MS Ali Emiri Arabi 2827, fol. 32b.

\textsuperscript{70} These examples can be greatly expanded based on the writings of ‘Oğmân Bîlânî, \textit{kuyumcu Agob}
of the seven metals and dedicated it to Sultan Bāyezīd II, making this one of the earliest known alchemical works with a specifically Ottoman context.  

Another late fifteenth-century figure, ‘Alī al-Marjūshī, known as “the blind sheikh,” was originally from Cairo and had instructed ‘Alī Çelebi’s teacher in the alchemical arts. A few decades later, the Tunisian sage Muḥammad Maghūsh famously presented a short treatise on alchemy to Sultan Süleymān. Parallel to the scholars from the Arab and the greater Iranian worlds that increasingly frequented the Ottoman realms, there were also numerous Rumis who travelled extensively throughout the Islamic world in search of religious, mystical, and occult knowledge; among them were many who sought the secrets of alchemy in foreign lands. One such Ottoman traveler, who does not reveal his name in the only known copy of a unique treatise, noted that he had studied and served a certain Sheikh Hasan in North Africa for many years before he returned to the lands of Rum as a master alchemist. It is certain that the possession of texts and demonstrable expertise in those branches of knowledge that were little understood and infrequently practiced in the nascent Ottoman society could bring prestige, fame, and wealth. When Ilyās ibn ‘Isā Şārūhani (d. 1558), a Bayrāmī mystic, visited a certain sheikh in Hamadan as part of his spiritual wanderings, the sheikh advised him to learn onomancy (‘ilm-i cifr), precisely because this science was unknown in the lands of Rum.

Even as scholars from Egypt, Syria, and Iran and beyond visited or settled in Rum, and the Rumi seekers of knowledge themselves travelled far and wide, the Western reaches of the

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71 The sole surviving copy of this work, dated Muḥarram 903/1497, appears to be Princeton MS Third Series 241. On alchemists and Sultan Bāyezīd II, and Bāyezīd II as an alchemist, see below, pp. 56-58.
72 See Chapter 3, pp. 151-53.
73 The most complete manuscript copy of this work, known simply as Risāla Maghūsh al-Maghrabī, ends with a note which explicitly states that Molla Maghūsh had divulged his knowledge of the philosopher’s stone (al-ḥajar al-mukarram) to Sultan Süleyman: Süleymaniye MS Bağdatlı Vehbi 2268, f. 34a.
74 Anonymous, untitled, Budapest MS Duod. Turc. 03, fol. 58b.
Islamic world, the Maghreb, held a special position with respect to alchemical expertise in the imagination of medieval and early modern learned Muslims. Ibn Khaldūn’s juxtaposition of Maghrebi “addicts” of alchemy with the supposed opposition to alchemy in the eastern parts of the Islamic world (on account of Ibn Sīnā’s rejection of metallic transmutation) is admittedly inaccurate, but it cannot be denied that the Maghreb had a distinct reputation for its occultists in general and alchemists in particular. Interestingly, it is the great Persian philosopher Ibn Sīnā, in a fictitious Ottoman-era biography that consists of folk stories whose protagonists are the Persian philosopher and his twin, who travels to the Maghreb in order to learn magic and other occult sciences.  

Perhaps the fate of Muslim Spain enhanced this image, as learned Iberian émigrés (Muslim and Jewish alike) brought not only their know-how, but also treasured manuscripts to the Ottoman world over the course of the sixteenth century. A number of the most important post-Jabirian alchemical texts available to Rumi had indeed been authored by Maghrebs, including those by Ibn Arfa’ Ra’s and al-Majritī. The venerated mystic Ibn ‘Arabī’s origins in Iberia, from where he had travelled to Syria and the lands of Rum in the thirteenth century, may also have been influential: in addition to the “spiritual alchemy” Ibn ‘Arabī elaborated upon in his al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiya (“Meccan Revelations”), numerous alchemical treatises had been posthumously ascribed to him. We have just seen that at least one Ottoman who had sought the  

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76 Among the versions of these collections of stories about Ibn Sīnā in the Turkish speaking world, those of Derviş Hasan Medhī and Seyyid Yahyā are the best known. The latter, better known under the title Gencîne-i hikmet (“The Treasure of Wisdom”) has been published in the late nineteenth century: Seyyid Yahyā, Hâzîhî hikâyet-i Ebû Alî ibn Sīnā (Bulaq: Matbaat Şâhib as-sa’āda, 1840). For the manuscript copies of these two versions, see Doğan Kaya, “İbn-i Sina Hikâyesinin Yeni Bir Yazma Nüshası,” Kebikeç 12 (2001), pp. 205-11.  

77 This is the Futūḥāt’s 167th chapter, which has been translated, with annotations, into French: L’alchimie du bonheur parfait, trans. Stéphane Ruspoli (Paris: Berg International, 1981). That numerous alchemical treatises bear Ibn ‘Arabī’s name is to be expected, both because of his saintly fame as “the greatest sheikh” (Muslim holy men, whether or not they were believed to have performed miracles of transmutation, were popular “targets” for pseudepigraphs) and the high opinion with which he viewed this body of knowledge, which he classified as “a
secrets of alchemy in the Maghreb. An earlier Ottoman work, an anonymous chronicle of the fifteenth century, similarly imagined the western edges of the Islamic world as the place from which some of Istanbul’s magical artifacts originated: as the chronicle describes, during the time of Yanko ibn Madyān (the legendary founder of Constantinople), a disciple of Idris/Hermes who was a master of astrology (‘ilm-i nūcūm), astronomy (hey’et), and alchemy (kīmyā’) had arrived from the Maghreb. He fashioned a golden starling statue which ensured the plentitude of olives in nearby areas. The same chronicle also speaks of a certain sage named Arkanos who, like the disciple of Idris, hailed from the Maghreb and made a number of talismanic statues for Constantinople. Such legendary accounts were rendered all the more believable as Maghrebi occultists wandered the lands of Rum and offered their services to all segments of the Ottoman society—in the second part of the present chapter, we will observe the cases of two Maghrebi alchemists in particular, one of whom was given patronage by Murād IV and another who claimed to teach the secrets of alchemy to commoners in northern Anatolia.

Whether or not the transmitters of alchemical knowledge were Rumis themselves, they did primarily address an Ottoman Rumi audience. Even though we know relatively little about the lives of early modern Ottoman alchemist-authors, their writings do allow us to situate them vis-à-vis their target audience. These treatises and books had been composed with the presumption of great authority, both with respect to their authors’ command of canonical texts and their technical know-how to put into practice the operations outlined therein. They had

natural, spiritual, and divine science.” Just as importantly, Ibn ‘Arabī was known as the red sulfur (al-kibrīt al-aḥmar), a man who had completed his journey to perfection, just like the red sulfur.


79 Anonim Osmanlı Kroniği, p. 97.

80 See below, pp. 68-69.
moreover been written, with a handful of exceptions, not for powerful patrons, so as to incur favors and support, but for the benefit of “seekers” (*ṭālibūn*) who desired to unlock the secrets of creation and out of the authors’ concern for transmitting and thus preserving alchemical, and divine, knowledge.81

The aforementioned exceptions are indeed few in number and are limited to four works in Turkish, Persian, and Arabic: among them are the abovementioned Persian and Arabic treatises of ‘Azīzullāh ibn ‘Aṭāullah Hindī and Muḥammad Maghūsh, which had been presented to Bāyezīd II and Süleymān I respectively. There is also a short Turkish treatise by a scholar known as Buğdaycızāde, which had been allegedly used to instruct a șehzāde (crown prince) named Muṣṭafā.82 If this statement, which precedes the introduction of the treatise, is indeed true, the șehzāde in question is perhaps Muṣṭafā II (r. 1664-1703), considering the seventeenth-century provenance of the work. Finally, an otherwise unknown religious scholar, perhaps of Syrian origins, named Muḥammad al-Maḳdisī authored in Arabic the *Durrat al-fākhra fī ʿilm al-iksīr* (“The Priceless Pearl for the Science of the Elixir”) in 1639 for the reigning Sultan Murād IV (r. 1612-40), who had recently returned victoriously from the Persian front. The second section of the present chapter begins a year earlier, with the Ottoman army’s fated eastern campaign to recapture Safavid-held Baghdad.

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81 The overwhelming majority of Ottoman alchemical works begin with a preamble to this effect. While some express their desire to aid the beginners and the seekers of the art matter-of-factly, others attribute the same effort to divine inspiration. One Rumi alchemist claimed to have been inspired in a waking dream to instruct the uninitiated, *Mecmūʿatü l-mücerrebāt*, 2b; another weaved an allegorical story in which he was travelling through a dark valley when he heard the cries for help of brothers trapped in a deep hole, symbolizing the difficult path of the art and those who have been led astray trying to follow it, Sheikh Muṣṭafā Sirōžī, *Risāle-i miftāḥü l-ēkber* (“The Treatise of the Greater Key”), Süleymaniye MS Bağdatlı Vehbi 2242, fol. 4a.

82 Buğdāycızāde, *Risāle-i Buğdāycızāde*, Süleymaniye MS Bağdath Vehbi 1012, fol. 1b and Ankara MS A 3103, fol. 39b.
Murād IV on the path to Baghdad

In the fall of 1638, as the Thirty Years’ War raged on in Europe, another war with sectarian dimensions that had been fought for over three decades was about to culminate in the Middle East. The Shia Safavid dynasty, which had not posed a significant threat to the Ottomans after the reign of Shah Ismā’īl (r. 1502-24), was resurgent since the turn of the century under Shah ‘Abbās (r. 1571-1629), having wrestled the control of a large territory in what is today the westernmost provinces of Iran, Azerbaijan, and Armenia away from the Ottoman Empire.83 Hostilities between the two states were intermittent and had more recently flared up again when the Safavids invaded Iraq, capturing the city of Baghdad in 1623.

The strategic and economic importance of Iraq can hardly be overstated—but its occupation by the Shia Safavids was also of tremendous religious significance. The tombs of the first and third Shia imams in Najaf and Karbala respectively are among the many shrines that dot the Iraqi landscape and which are central to the Shia’s historical memory. The Safavid takeover of these holy sites completed the long-term strategy of Shah ‘Abbās to control the major Shia pilgrimage centers in the Islamic world, which had begun to decades earlier with the occupation of Mashhad in Khorasan, where the tomb of the eighth imam ‘Alī Reżā (ar-Riḍā; d. 818) was located.84 Iraq, and more specifically Baghdad, was no less important for the Ottoman sultans,

84 The activities of Shah Abbas in the years before his full-scale invasion of Iraq indeed suggest that he pursued a policy of controlling the major Shi’a holy sites. His eastern campaigns and his subsequent pilgrimage to Mashhad is one of the indicators of this policy. See Charles Melville, “The Pilgrimage to Mashhad in 1601,” in Charles Melville, ed., Safavid Persia: The History and Politics of an Islamic Society (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 1996), pp. 191-229. In a similar vein, the Shah oversaw the construction of the vast shrine dedicated to Imam ‘Alī Reżā’s sister Fāṭema Ma’sūme (Fāṭima al-Ma’sūma) in Qom and re-occupied Tabriz in person, a town of great political and religious significance as the birthplace of the Šafaviyya order, whose citizens enthusiastically
who had over the past century continuously juxtaposed their Sunni orthodoxy to the “heresy” of the Safavids. Two religious figures who command great respect and veneration from Sunnis are buried within the city of Baghdad: Abū Ḥanīfa (d. 767), the founder of the Ḥanafī school of Sunni jurisprudence, which was officially promoted by the Ottomans, and Sheikh ‘Abdu’l-Qādir Ḡilānī (d. 1166), the eponymous founder of the Qādiriyya order, whose followers constituted one of the most significant branches of Sufism in the Ottoman realm, in particular among the Kurdish and Arab population of Mesopotamia and Iraq. Soon after the conquest of Iraq by Sultan Süleymān in 1534, Abū Ḥanīfa’s tomb, which had been previously sacked by Shah Ismail, was restored, in a similar vein, a dome had been built over the shrine of ‘Abdu’l-Qādir Ḡilānī. After the fall of Baghdad to the Safavids in 1623, not only did the city’s Sunni population suffer violence and exile, but the aforementioned shrines were pillaged in a symbolic blow to Ottoman power in the region.

The Safavid successes in the early seventeenth century were as much due to the tireless efforts of Shah ‘Abbās and his court as they were to turmoil within the Ottoman Empire.

Rebellions in the Anatolian countryside were endemic and difficult to control at a time when political uncertainty gripped Istanbul. In 1622, not coincidentally shortly before the Safavid


85 For Ottoman Hanafism, see Hayrettin Kahraman, “The Sectarian Preference in the Ottoman Jurisprudence,” in Kemal Çiçek, ed., The Great Ottoman Turkish Civilization vol. 3 (Ankara: Yeni Türkiye, 2000), pp. 666-75 and Rudolf Peters, “What Does It Mean to Be an Official Madhhab? Hanafism and the Ottoman Empire,” in Peri Bearman, Rudolph Peters, and Frank E. Vogel, eds., The Islamic School of Law: Evolution, Devolution and Progress (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), pp. 147-58. While the Qādiriyya benefited from imperial munificence in Baghdad, it had no presence in Istanbul until the seventeenth century. A sub-branch of the order, however, the Eşrefiyye, did have strong local following in northwestern Anatolia. See Chapter 4.

occupation of Baghdad, an uprising in Istanbul that was sanctioned by the capital’s religious establishment and led by the janissaries had resulted in the unprecedented execution of a reigning Ottoman sultan, ‘Osmān II (r. 1618-22). A year later, his uncle and successor, Muṣṭafā I was also overthrown and in his place Murād IV was placed on the throne at the young age of ten, a mere figurehead who had little sway over the affairs of the state.87

The swift “administration of justice” was one of the ways in which Murād came to establish his personal authority in the capital and avoided the fate shared by his brother and uncle. Even the ‘ulemā, who were not accustomed to be on the receiving end of capital punishment, were not immune: when the Sultan had the Muslim judge of Iznik put to death, ostensibly because the latter had failed to clear the mud off the city’s gates before his arrival, Sheikhu’l-islâm Aḥīzāde Hüseyin Efendi, the highest ranking religious official in the Empire, was sufficiently scandalized to protest this in writing to the Valide Sultan (i.e. Queen Mother) Kösem. Once the contents of the letter were revealed to the Sultan, he had the sheikhu’l-islâm exiled to Cyprus. Aḥīzāde never set foot on the island. Perhaps unsure of how the populace of Istanbul would react to the killing of the sheikhu’l-islâm, Murād IV sent his executioner after Aḥīzāde. The death sentence was carried out in Büyükçekmece, some thirty miles to the west of the capital on the coast of Marmara Sea, and the corpse was discreetly buried. It is evident that the Sultan had resolved to intimidate the ‘ilmiyye establishment, some of the high-ranking members of which had sanctioned the dethronement of ‘Osmān II and Muṣṭafā I. As the first Sultan in recent memory to personally to lead the Ottoman army, Murād IV was also able to

87 This was the formative years of a new political reality that has been recently christened as “the Second Ottoman Empire” by Baki Tezcan. Its beginnings, Tezcan argues, was characterized by an expansion of the Ottoman ruling class, which had previously restricted to the highest ranking members of the Sultanic household, to include a more assertive ‘ilmiyye class and a demographically transformed janissary corps, whose ranks had swollen with an influx of middle class Muslims that had purchased their way into the corps. See Baki Tezcan, The Second Ottoman Empire: Political and Social Transformation in the Early Modern World (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), especially pp. 46-78 and 191-98.
dispense summary justice in the provinces while campaigning—the official journal (rüznâme) of
the Erivan/Yerevan campaign in 1635 records hundreds of executions.  

An equally bloody trail followed the march of the Ottoman forces across the central
Anatolian plateau and into northern Mesopotamia through the summer of 1638. In the first days
of the fall, the army encamped just to the north of the city of Aleppo in Syria. According to some
Ottoman historians, it was here and then that Murâd IV gave an audience to Maḥmūd Urmevī, a
Nakshbendī sheikh who would become one of the most infamous casualties of the Sultan’s Iraqi
campaign. As his name suggests, the sheikh was originally from Urmiye in present-day Iran.
His family had been forced to relocate to Diyarbakır, where Urmevī still resided, some two
hundred and fifty miles to the northeast of Aleppo. His appearance at the Ottoman encampment
in northern Syria may therefore have been a pleasant surprise. If this first encounter did indeed
occur near Aleppo, it is likely that the sheikh had traveled such a long distance to “bless” the
Ottoman army in person and pray for the victory of the Sultan. By the fall of the same year
Urmevī’s prayers were answered, with the Safavids having been forced out of Baghdad and
Murâd IV triumphantly returning back to Istanbul as the conqueror of Iraq. The sheikh himself,
however, was dead and buried, possibly in two pieces.

The execution of Urmevī was an event that almost overshadowed the Sultan’s victory
over the Safavids. The Sheikh had been one of the most prominent Naqshbandī mystics alive and
his followers in Ottoman Kurdistan were reputed to number in the thousands—his killing was

subject of Naqshbandiyya’s Urmevī branch and its devotional particularities, such as the practice of vocal dhikr, see
Dina Le Gall, A Culture of Sufism: Naqshbandis in the Ottoman World, 1450-1700 (Albany: State University of
New York Press, 2005), pp. 73-75. The sheikh is better known in the Ottoman sources as Rūmiye şeyhi (“the sheikh
of Rūmiye”), following a common variation of the town’s name, Urmiye.
therefore just as, if not more, shocking as that of Aḥīzāde.\textsuperscript{91} For many a near-contemporary
Ottoman, this killing was not only unjustified, but also politically motivated. The lesson of the
rise of the Safavid dynasty, who had initially been a family of charismatic Sufis, was not lost to
the Ottoman sultans. Popular mystics, especially those with an established “power base” in the
provinces, were commonly seen as potential threats, because they had the potential to
dangerously combine in their person spiritual power with a temporal one. Ottoman sources
suggest that Murād IV had been influenced in his decision to get rid of the Sheikh after having
heard, and then witnessed, the reverence with which the local population (and even some of the
provincial Ottoman administrators) held the latter. The exclusive focus of modern studies on the
political dimensions of this episode is therefore not altogether unwarranted.\textsuperscript{92}

Nonetheless, some of the very Ottoman sources that justify such a focus also contain
elements of a story that is of significance for the purposes of the present chapter. Among these
narratives of Sheikh Urmevī’s execution, two of them, namely those of the historian Muṣṭafā
Naʿīma (d. 1716) and the celebrated traveler Evliyā Çelebi (d. 1682) share certain elements that
are of particular interest. During his stay in Diyarbekir, the latter had visited the resting place of
Urmevī, and occasion which is used in the Seyāḥatnāme (“Book of Travels”) to give an excursus
on the Sheikh’s death. In this version of the story too there is the familiar agency of backbiters
(ḡammaz), who poison Murād IV’s mind with alarming reports about the number of Urmevī’s

\textsuperscript{91} The strong sentiments invoked by this execution are reflected in the fact that the Sheikh quickly acquired the
epithet ash-shahīd (“the martyr”) following his death. Evliyā Çelebi, writing a few decades after the execution,
similarly interpreted this tragic event (şehīd edildiğinde): Seyahatnâme, vol. 3, p. 28.
\textsuperscript{92} Most notably Le Gall, pp. 77-79, and Martin van Bruinessen’s excellent article, “The Naqshbandi Order in
Seventeenth-Century Kurdistan,” in Marc Gaborieau, Alexandre Popovic, and Thierry Zarcone, eds., Naqshbandis
(Istanbul and Paris: Editions Isis, 1990), pp. 344-53. For the sake of clarification, both Le Gall and van Bruinessen
discuss the stories that circulated about Urmevī’s dabbling in alchemy, but their focus, just like that of our Ottoman
sources, is rather on the political motivations of Murād IV.
supporters and his intent of rebellion to establish independent rule (ḫurūc). The same group of envious yet anonymous men, having failed to secure the sheikh’s fall from sultanic grace, then attempt to achieve their goal by informing Murâd IV that Urmevî knows the secrets of the great elixir and can turn base metals into gold. This power of the sheikh the Sultan would supposedly witness first hand in the city of Diyarbekir, after his return from Iraq and questioning the sheikh about alchemy. Once confirmed, the Sheikh’s knowledge of the art would cost him his life.

In this brief summary of Evliyâ’s account, I have intentionally left out a crucial detail so as to draw special attention to it. Despite Urmevî’s emphatically affirmative reply to the Sultan when the latter asked him if there is any truth to alchemy, it was not the sheikh who displayed any knowledge of this science after all, but another person in his household who prepared the “the supreme elixir” (iksîr-i ‘ażâm) and applied it to copper, which was then transformed into gold. Evliyâ names this alchemist simply as “the daughter of Ma’anoğlu” (Ma’anoğlu kızı), who would have been of great interest to Murâd IV by virtue of her immediate family. The Ma’anoğlus or Ma’anzâdes, as they were known in Istanbul, were one of the most powerful Druze families in early modern Syria and their rule over much of Mount Lebanon had been acknowledged by the Ottomans. The family’s relationship with the Porte, however, was a complicated one, and had more recently taken a violent turn as Fakhraddîn [II] ibn Ma’an (d. 1636) was suspected of having pretensions of independence. Fleeing before Ḥâfız Aḥmed Pasha’s forces in 1612, the emir had sought refuge in Tuscany, where he was hosted by the Medici family for five years. The political upheavals in Istanbul that had facilitated Shah

‘Abbās’ advances in Iraq also allowed the emir to return to Lebanon in 1617, where he re-established his power until the decisive defeat dealt to the Ma’anoğlus by Küçük Aḥmed Paşa in 1636. Fakhraddīn was captured along with his three sons, brought to Istanbul, and executed in the presence of the Sultan. This was the end of Fakhraddīn ibn Ma’an, but not of the Ma’anoğlus, who remained as an important force in Mount Lebanon up to the early 1660s. More importantly, the youngest of the emir’s captured sons, Ḥüseyin (d. 1690/1), survived his father’s death and was raised in the imperial palace. He would receive important posts in government, including that of the *sir kātibi* (“private secretary”) to Meḥmed IV (r. 1648-87) and, in his later years, the Ottoman envoy to the Mughal court. The emir also had a daughter, our *Ma’anoğlu kızı*, who had allegedly travelled to Diyarbekir dressed as a boy and taken refuge in Sheikh Urmevī’s harem. According to both Evliyā and Na’īmā, she claimed to have learned the secrets of alchemy from her father, whose erudition on astronomy and *la chimie* had been recounted to a near-contemporary French traveler.

According to Na’īmā, the daughter of Ma’anoğlu had similarly played a central role in Urmevī’s execution. One important difference, however, is that in Na’īmā’s account, it was the sheikh who had introduced her to Murād IV while visiting the Ottoman military encampment near Aleppo. The Sheikh, depicted as a naïve man, had been misled by the young woman, who convinced him that she had learned the secrets of alchemy from her father. In this version of the story, Urmevī simply wished to aid the war effort by informing the Sultan about the alchemical powers of Ma’anoğlu’s daughter. Na’īmā tells us that the Sultan allocated a thousand florins for

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95 Boutrous Dib, op. cit., pp. 379-83.
96 “Hüseyin Bey (Maanoğlu),” *Sicill-i Osmani*, vol. 3, p. 698.
97 This was the French diplomat and orientalist Laurent d’Arvieux (1635-1702), one time resident of Izmir, who later acted as the French consul to Aleppo from 1679 to 1689. See L. d’Arvieux, *Mémoires* vol. I (Paris: C. J. B. Delespine, 1735), p. 364. Cf. van Bruinessen, “The Naqshbandi Order in Seventeenth-Century Kurdistan,” fn. 17. Van Bruinessen’s assertion that d’Arvieux had met Fakhraddīn cannot be true, of course, as the Frenchman was but a year old at the time of the emir’s execution.
the establishment of a workshop in Diyarbekir, which was furnished with alembics, receptacles for distillation and other alchemical tools—not only did the operations conducted there came to naught, but the daughter of Ma’anoğlu supposedly, and scandalously, spent some of the funds to party with young musicians in the city while the Sultan was campaigning in Iraq. Needless to say, once Murâd found the undertaking to have failed upon his return from the front, he had both the sheikh and the Ma’anoğlu kızı put to death.

As has been observed in a modern study, Na‘îmâ’s immediate source for this story was almost certainly Aḥmed Şārihû’l-Menârzâde (d. ca. 1657), whose notes for an unfinished chronicle had served as the foundation of Na‘îmâ’s own work.98 The latter is known to have incorporated some passages from Menârzâde verbatim and it appears that we are faced with a similar situation here. Menârzâde had explicitly written that he had been informed on the matter by Ḥüseyin Efendi, a reputable person who was privy of many secrets (maḥrem-i esrâr) and who had moreover been in the service of Silâhdâr [Muṣṭafâ] Paşa (d. 1642).99 The latter statesman, the ultimate origin of our story, had been a close companion of Murâd IV and participated in the Baghdad campaign, having become the interim chief vizier after the capture of the city.100 In short, while Na‘îmâ composed his history within the first decade of the eighteenth century, his narrative for the alchemical workshop at Diyarbekir was based on Menârzâde’s notes that had been informed by eyewitness accounts. As for Evliyâ Çelebi, it is likely that he had listened to some version of the story from Melek Aḥmed Paşa (d. 1662), a maternal relative and benefactor of Evliyâ. It is important to note that Melek Aḥmed had acted as the governor of Diyarbekir in

100 Considering his importance in early seventeenth-century Ottoman administration, modern studies on Silâhdâr Muṣṭafâ Pasha are unfortunately scarce. One exception, which focuses on the building activities of the pasha in the provinces, is Nejat Göyünç, “Eski Malatya’da Silahdar Mustafa Paşa Hanî ve Hanîn Restitüsyonu Hakkında,” İstanbul Üniversitesi Edebiyat Fakültesi Tarih Enstitüsü Dergisi 1 (1970), pp. 63-92.
1640, where he would have heard this and many other stories concerning the execution of Sheikh Urmevî, who would also appear to the Pasha in a revelatory dream.  

And yet what of Murâd IV’s apparent interest in alchemy? If true at all, was this just a feigned curiosity on the part of the Sultan so as to frame Urmevî? Another, and relatively obscure, execution that took place in Istanbul later in the same year would suggest otherwise.

Shortly after the Ottoman army’s victorious return to Istanbul from Iraq, a Maghrebi alchemist claiming to know the secrets of the supreme elixir arrived at the Topkapı palace, where, once again, a workshop was quickly established for his operations. The unnamed Maghrebi would spend several days in this workshop to prepare the elixir. Finally, and in the presence of the Sultan who was accompanied by his kuyumcubâşı (chief jeweler), a trace amount of liquefied pure silver was combined with the elixir, a common method in metallic transmutation that is, in principle, similar to the use of yeast in fermentation. The results were found to be unsatisfactory to the Sultan who had the alchemist strangled and unceremoniously thrown into the waters of the Bosphorus. Murâd IV himself did not live long after this event. Following his death within the same year, Hüseyin ibn Ma‘an, who had witnessed both the experiment and the Maghrebi alchemist’s execution, was appointed as the kethüda (steward) of the imperial treasury—therein he discovered the Maghrebi’s compound, which to his amazement had corroded its envelope. Hüseyin was an older contemporary of Na‘îmâ, who narrates some of

\[\text{\textsuperscript{101}}\] In this dream, the sheikh foretold the rise of Köprülü Meḥmed Paşa to the grand vizierate and the final conquest of Crete by the Ottoman forces. For an annotated translation of this dream sequence, see Robert Dankoff, *The Intimate Life of an Ottoman Statesman: Melek Ahmed Pasha (1588-1662) as portrayed in Evliya Çelebi’s Book of Travels* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1991), p. 205-06.


\[\text{\textsuperscript{103}}\] On this subject, as well as the related procedure called “projection” (*ṭarth*), see Chapter 2, pp. 93-94. The presence of the *kuyumcubâşı*, the chief of the jewelers at the imperial palace, is interesting for another reason, namely because of ‘Alî Çelebi’s characterization of this group as the enemies of all alchemists. See above, fn. 18.

the stories concerning palace life in his history directly from Ḫūseyin. This event-story therefore constitutes a more reliable evidence for the sultanic patronage of alchemist(s) in the reign of Murād IV.

_A gift for the Sultan_

The lone surviving copy of a seventeenth-century alchemical work gives further credence to the notion that Murād IV’s interest in metallic transmutation was not an invention of his courtiers’ imagination. This is the _Durrat al-fākhira fī ‘ilm al-iksīr_ by Muḥammad al-Maqdisī, who had completed and presented the treatise to the Sultan quite significantly in 1049/1639, on the heels of the failed experiment(s). Maqdisī’s treatise, which covers a wide range of theoretical and practical topics in twenty folios, would not have been particularly impressive in 1630s Istanbul, where the voluminous writings of Jābir, Jaldakī, and the Ottoman ʿAlī Çelebi were already available in various libraries. As we have already seen, the inventory prepared by ʿAṭūfī reveals that the Topkapı Palace library itself was home to numerous alchemical works. It is difficult to say, of course, how many of these manuscripts survived or were still a part of the Topkapı collection at the time of Murād IV. From among the eleven manuscripts containing alchemical writings listed by ʿAṭūfī in 1503, I was able to definitively identify one that wound up in the Lala İsmail collection in the eighteenth century—it is almost certain that this manuscript was still in the Topkapı Palace through the seventeenth century, and indeed until the addition of the Lala İsmail Efendi collection to the Hamidiye Library in 1784. Needless to say, other

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105 On Ḫūseyin ibn Ma’an as one of the “eyewitness” sources of Naʿīmā’s history, see Asaf Halet Çelebi, _Naima: Hayati, Sanati, Eserleri_ (Istanbul: Varlık Yayınevi, 1953), p. 13.

106 This is the fifth of eleven manuscripts, in which there were three separate works: the second section (qutb) of the conclusion (khātima) of Qutbaddīn Maḥmūd Shīrāzī’s (d. 1311) famous encyclopedia _Durrat at-tāj_ (“The Pearly
alchemical works had joined the Topkapı Palace library since 1503, such as the aforementioned
two works by Jaldakī. Perhaps the most striking of these new arrivals, however, is an
illustrated Ilkhanid-period copy of Ibn Umayl’s Risālat ash-shams ilā ’l-hilāl and the author’s
own commentary to this poem, Kitāb al-Mā’ al-waragī wa ’l-ard an-najmiyya (“The Silvery
Water and the Starry Earth”). This lavish manuscript had been in Istanbul at least since the reign
of Murād III (r. 1574-1595), and possibly earlier. 

The fact that these, and probably many more, alchemical works were at the Sultan’s
fingertips notwithstanding, the Durrat al-fākhira would not have been without its merits: it
explains alchemical precepts in a clear and straightforward language. Coupled with the Durrat
al-fākhira’s relative brevity, these traits rendered it a much more “practical” manual than its
venerable competitors. With respect to its contents, the work treats a wide-range of subjects from
the discussion of the seven metals and the celestial forces that affect them, to the importance of
‘ilm al-jifar for practicing alchemy. The greater part of it, however, is devoted to the more
technical aspects of metallic transmutation and includes detailed alchemical recipes, which is
rather unusual for a work that had been presented to a Sultan. Authoritative figures of alchemy
from the Greco-Islamic tradition make their appearance in this latter section as one would

107 For more on the significance of this uniquely important manuscript, see Persis Berlekamp, “Painting as
pp. 35-59.
108 The manuscript is known to have been “checked out” by (Cüce) Zeyrek Ağa, one of the powerful palace dwarves
during the reign of Murād III: ibid., fn. 100.
expect: Hermes, Aristotle, Plato, and Zosimos are predictably joined by the Muslim alchemists Jābir and Ibn Umayl.

The *Durrat al-fākhira*’s distinctively Ottoman milieu could have been gathered even in the absence of its introduction which includes the author’s dedication of the work to Murād IV: among the authorities cited by Maqdisī, we find Bostān Efendi, whose significance as the first known Rumi author of alchemical texts we have already observed above. Maqdisī also draws attention to the fact that Süleymān the Magnificent had given patronage to Maghush al-Maghribī, perhaps in an attempt to inform the sultan about his celebrated ancestor’s treatment of learned alchemists. The *Durrat al-fākhira* then refers to another, and somewhat unexpected, figure as many times as all the other alchemical authors combined, the Ottoman Sultan Bāyezīd II. Maqdisī claims that the sultan himself had been a master of alchemy and had pursued its deepest secrets. After this initial introduction of Bāyezīd’s knowledge of the art, several recipes and alchemical operations are then transmitted on the authority of the Sultan. That Bāyezīd II was a practicing alchemist is of course virtually unknown in sources dating from his reign or from those of the later sixteenth century. He does make infrequent but noteworthy appearances, however, in the Ottoman alchemical tradition of the seventeenth century.

A Turkish treatise from this period, for example, asserts that the Sultan had been initiated into the alchemical arts by none other than Aḥmed Şemseddīn Şārūḥānī, the teacher of ʿAlī Çelebi. Bāyezīd II was also supposedly the recipient of a short alchemical poem in the Turkish vernacular written by unspecified sages; the poem is found, once again, in a seventeenth-century

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110 Ibid., fol. 3b.
111 Ibid., fol. 7b.
collection of alchemical treatises. Another manuscript of this period that contains several Hebrew works on alchemy also includes a recipe whose source is cited as Sultan Bāyezīd—the fact that the Sephardi Jews of Spain had settled in the Ottoman Empire in large numbers during this Sultan’s reign renders this recipe of special interest. Admittedly, all of these examples are from much later periods and almost certainly apocryphal—what is evident is that Bāyezīd II had a reputation, at least among circles dabbling in alchemy in the seventeenth century Ottoman world, for having been a practitioner of the art.

One explanation for such a reputation is that the Sultan was widely believed to have been a velī, or saint, especially recognized as such among the mystically inclined Ottomans. The belief that “the friends of God” (evliyāu’llāh), just like the prophets, had alchemical powers found universal acceptance in the Islamic world, unlike the notion that the same powers could be unlocked through human artifice. Muslim hagiographies, Ottoman or otherwise, are a good indication of just how widespread this belief was among Sufi circles. The Islamic alchemical tradition likewise reveals the widespread categorization of alchemical powers as either “true miracles” (mu’cize), “divine favors” (kerāmet), or “craft” (ṣan’at), which are displayed by prophets, saints, and alchemist-sages respectively. These categories, I must note, were not taken to be mutually exclusive, as the possessors of the first two could, and did, impart their God-given

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113 The full Persian title/heading of this short Turkish poem of eighteen couplets is “On the Poem of the Elixir sent from the noble scholars and the great sages to his majesty Sultan Bāyezīd, [may God give] mercy to him, when he requested an explanation of alchemy,” Vienna MS AF 327, fol. 92b.
116 The commonly-held belief in master sufis’ powers of metallic transmutation can be seen, for example, in the way in which Mısır ‘Ōmer Efendi (d. 1658) was asked to display an alchemical miracle, the person who demanded to witness it simply stated “the friends of God turn soil into gold” (evliyāullāh turabı altun iderler): Mehmed Nazmi Efendi, Hediyetü’l-ihvān (İstanbul: İnsan Yayınları, 2005), p. 575.
knowledge to the worthy. Indeed, this act of transmission (from God to the prophets and unto the saints) was believed to be the very source of the science of alchemy as it was practiced by the sages and philosophers, who accessed the divine powers of transmutation/creation through their art. In short, Bāyezīd II’s sainthood would not only make him a very likely candidate for having access to alchemical powers, but also place him firmly within the genealogy of alchemical knowledge that flows from the Creator to the worthiest of the learned.

Be that as it may, Murād IV was unlikely to have attached much importance to the spiritual dimensions of alchemy. Bāyezīd was of relevance to the Sultan not because of his alleged sainthood, but due to the way in which his reign was imagined: viewed from the testy and uncertain 1630s, the late-fifteenth century Istanbul of Bāyezīd II was a land of peace and prosperity. The historical memory of this earlier period was not exactly accurate, but nonetheless powerful. The sultans of the fifteenth century were supposedly dominant figures whose authority was rarely challenged and who commanded absolute loyalty from the military and the religious establishment. Murād IV fashioned himself after these much romanticized early Ottoman Sultans, pushing back against some of the forces, such as the janissaries and the religious scholars, who had recently claimed a bigger stake in the political life of the Empire. Read in this light, for Murād IV, the Durrat al-fākhira must have served as a powerful “reminder” (however imaginary) of the authority enjoyed by many of his ancestors and predecessors. The treatise was also one of many such alchemical works produced within the Ottoman world in the seventeenth century, the overwhelming majority of which did not address the sultans, or other powerful men of the Empire, but rather those inexperienced seekers of divine wisdom for whom the alchemical arts represented the epitome of all sciences. It is more than likely that Murād IV’s interactions with various alchemists were not unrelated to the noticeable surge of interest in alchemy within
the lands of Rum in the long seventeenth century. Let us now attempt to contextualize first the former and then the latter so as to explore the possible links between them.

A seventeenth-century moment?

The presentation of Maḳdīsī’s *Durrat al-fākhira* to Mūrād IV had coincided with the establishment of two alchemical workshops by the orders of the Sultan, but to what end? Alchemy had never been much more than an object of intellectual curiosity in the palace and no Ottoman Sultan before Mūrād IV is known to have funded such alchemical experiments. Unlike medicine or astronomy/astrology, it had not enjoyed an institutional presence at the Ottoman court and, more to the point, alchemy was far from being a universally respected branch of science. While saintly figures were commonly believed to have God-granted alchemical powers, the very possibility of metallic transmutation through human art was frequently, and forcefully, challenged. A saying well-known to the Ottomans, attributed to a number of historical figures, including Abū Yūsuf (d. 798), the most illustrious student of İmam Abū Ḥanīfa and the chief judge of Baghdad under the Abbasid caliph Hārūn ar-Rashīd (r. 786-809), warns that “whoever seeks wealth through alchemy becomes a poor man.”117 Just as damming was the respected opinion of the eleventh-century Persian physician and philosopher Ibn Sīnā who categorically

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117 One of the first sources to report this saying appears to be Abū Ḥayyān at-Tawḥīdī (d. 1023), see Joel L. Kraemer, *Philosophy in the Renaissance of Islam: Abū Sulaymān al-Sijistānī and His Circle* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1986), pp. 249-50. It was the work of another scholar of the eastern Islamic world, however, that would greatly popularize it, namely ʿAbdallāh al-Anṣārī al-Harawī al-Ḥanbalī’s (d. 1089) *Dhamm al-kalām wa ahlih* (“The Censure of Speculative Theology and its Practitioners”) in which Anṣārī utilized this and other sayings primarily, together with their chains of transmission (iṣnād), to counter the mutakallimūn, and thereby avoid engaging with the latter group’s claims without resorting to “speculation” himself. See Ahmed Ateş, “ʿAbdallah al-Anṣārī’nin Kitab Ḍamm al-Kalām wa Ahlih Adlı Eseri,” *Şarkiyat Mecmuası* 5 (1964), pp. 45-60. The saying concerning alchemy in full was: “Whoever seeks the religion (dīn) through speculative theology (kalām) becomes a heretic (zindiq), whoever seeks strange sayings (ahādīth al-gharība) becomes a liar, and whoever seeks wealth through alchemy becomes a poor man.” *Dhamm al-kalām wa ahlih* (Medina: Maktabat al-Ghurabāʾ al-Atharī yah, 1998), vol. 4, p. 210: no. 1009.
denied the possibility of metallic transmutation based on his own theory of how metal ores formed— Ibn Sīnā’s rejection of this foundational precept of alchemy, and the Jabirian theory for the formation of metals, was well-known to learned Ottomans both because it is found in one of Ibn Sīnā’s most popular works, the *Kitāb ash-Shifā’,* and due to the fact that it was a much quoted opinion both by the practitioners and opponents of alchemy.\textsuperscript{118} Another case commonly made against metallic transmutation in the Islamic world, and one that has been briefly mentioned above, was that if it were possible it would disrupt the natural order of the world as ordained by God: gold and silver had been created to facilitate trade and commerce between peoples and to separate rulers from the ruled. If anyone could produce precious metals, the world would be thrown into chaos.\textsuperscript{119} Such commonly held negative views about alchemy, expressed in a wide range of literature opposed to its practice, perpetuated the notion that since metallic transmutation was not truly possible, the majority of artisan-alchemists were nothing more than swindlers and that their ultimate goal was to counterfeit official coinage.\textsuperscript{120}

The details of Murād IV’s interaction with the two ill-fated alchemists seem to suggest, however, that counterfeiting coinage was not very far from what the Sultan himself sought. It is noteworthy that at both alchemical workshops which he allegedly financed, expert appraisers were present: in Diyarbekir, the Sultan had assigned officials from the imperial mint to oversee the efforts of Ma‘anoğlu’s daughter and in Istanbul, his chief jeweler was present during the last phase of the experiments. Even more remarkable yet is the fact that in the latter case, the final

\textsuperscript{118} See above fn. 21 for the way in which this argument was deflected and inverted by one eighteenth century Ottoman alchemist.

\textsuperscript{119} Ibn Khaldūn, *Muqaddimah,* p. 410. Ibn Khaldūn classifies this as the consequential argument against the possibility of metallic transmutation, that is, the end result of alchemy renders its existence impossible.

\textsuperscript{120} Perhaps the most articulate denunciation of alchemists as frauds is that of ‘Abdu’r-Rahman al-Jawbarī (d.1222), whose *Kitāb al-Mukhtār fī kashf al-asrār* was also readily available in the Ottoman world. On his opinion concerning alchemical fraud, see Harold J. Abrahams, “Al-Jawbari on False Alchemists,” *Ambix* 31:2 (July 1984), pp. 84-88.
result, the aforementioned molten mixture, had been poured into a coin mold prior to inspection.\textsuperscript{121} Finally, the daughter of Ma’anoğlu had allegedly told her overseers that she had observed the methods of her father to mint coins in Lebanon using very little precious metals, the exact same operation she was then attempting to replicate—this suggests that in Diyarbekir too, the ultimate objective had been to strike silver coinage with as little contribution from mother nature as possible.\textsuperscript{122}

We can begin to contextualize these details only once the timing of the experiments, and that of the presentation of Maqdisi’s treatise, is considered: they all had come on the heels of the costly Iraq campaign that had been successfully completed, but had also intensified the financial troubles faced by the state.\textsuperscript{123} The Ottoman central government, since the late 1500s, had been mired in a severe monetary crisis. Multiple factors contributed to the state’s inability to meet its financial obligations: falling revenues (precipitated both by the de facto or de jure loss of territory, the Celali revolts, and crop failures amplified by the onset of the Little Ice Age), rising expenditures, especially military spending as the ranks of the Janissary corps swelled, and the

\textsuperscript{121} According to Hüseyin ibn Ma’an, the molten mixture that had been poured into the mold (sebike) had the appearance of gold coins minted in Egypt (ayarlı eşrefi suretinde): Na’imā, vol. 3, p. 371. The Ottoman gold coin had its origins in Mamluk Egypt, where it had been known as the ashrafi, which was continued to be struck after the Ottoman conquest in 1517—the latter was properly called the sulṭānī, but in later times, both the Ottoman gold coin and European gold coinage were commonly referred to as şerifi or eşrefi: Şevket Pamuk, \textit{A Monetary History of the Ottoman Empire} (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 97-98.

\textsuperscript{122} The officials from the mint were unimpressed with the result of the experiment, and perhaps concerned for their own safety with the return of the Sultan approaching. The response of the daughter of Ma’anoğlu to them is in fact a defense of her initial attempts: “My father minted these (i.e. the compound) and spent them in his homeland…” (Benim babam bunları sikkeleyip nemleketinde harc ederdi). She also claimed to know alchemical operations whose results would pass the minters’ tests, but insisted that she would do these alone, away from the watchful eyes of the overseers (Ben imtihanı gelir şey de bilirim, lâkin anı muhtefi yaparm). Na’imā, vol. 3, p. 367. Her father was indeed reputed to have minted counterfeit European coinage in Lebanon according to contemporary observers. See below, pp. 64-65. This story was famous enough that later generations of Ottoman alchemists attributed certain alchemical procedures to the Ma’anoğlus, see for example ‘Oşmān Bilānī, Rısağ-e Iksir-i ‘Azīm, Istanbul University MS TY 7025, fol. 46a.

\textsuperscript{123} The link between the two eastern campaigns of Murād IV and the rapidly deteriorating financial position of the central government in the 1640s has been argued by Anton Schaendlinger: “Die Perserkriege, die er zwar erfolgreich führen konnte, kosteten sehr viel Geld, das zu beschaffen er durch seinen frühen Tod seinem Nachfolger als Erbe hinterließ.” A. Schaendlinger, \textit{Osmanische Numismatik: von den Anfängen des Osmanischen Reiches bis zu seiner Auflösung 1922} (Braunschweig: Klinkhardt & Biermann, 1973), p. 10.
declining output of Ottoman silver mines in the Balkans.\(^{124}\) Perhaps the most devastating factor, however, was one which affected the economy of not just the Ottoman Empire, but also those of Habsburg Spain, Ming China, and, in the eighteenth century, eventually that of Mughal India.\(^{125}\) The colonization of the Americas had resulted in one of the largest and fastest infusions of precious metals into the world markets in history. While the impact of this phenomenon was felt globally, its outcomes varied according to local conditions. Leaving the troubles of the central government aside, it is clear that increased trade with Western Europeans brought much wealth to certain segments of the population in a number of Ottoman cities.\(^{126}\) And yet the increased European demand for Ottoman agricultural products, and European traders’ expanding purchasing power due to New World silver, would also contribute to the dramatic price increases

\(^{124}\) On the impact of the Little Ice Age in this context, see Sam White, *The Climate of Rebellion in the Early Modern Ottoman Empire* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), especially pp. 260-64. For the decline of the silver output of Ottoman mines, see Pamuk, op. cit., p. 139.


\(^{126}\) A case in point is the rise of Izmir, whose journey to become one of the most important port cities of the Mediterranean by the nineteenth century began precisely in this period: Daniel Goffman, “Izmir: From Village to Colonial Port City,” in Edhem Eldem, Daniel Goffman, Bruce Masters, eds., *The Ottoman City between East and West: Aleppo, Izmir, and Istanbul* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 79-134, see especially pp. 87-95.
in the Ottoman Empire, an upward trend that peaked in the 1620s. By that time, the most drastic debasement of *akçe*, the Ottoman silver currency, had already taken place. This was the 1585-86 debasement, causing the *akçe* to enter half a century-long period of instability, at the end of which the mints in the central lands of the Empire were no longer producing this denomination.

Considering these circumstances, it is not difficult to appreciate the appeal of alchemy. Murâd IV is likely to have turned to metallic transmutation as a miraculous ticket out of his limited financial means. The Turkish historian of science İhsan Fazlıoğlu was the first scholar to hypothesize that the monetary crisis of the late sixteenth century might have contributed to a heightened interest in alchemy throughout the Ottoman world. In the case of Murâd IV, we not only have an evidence for such a development, but are also able to identify a particular aspect of the monetary crisis as the likely culprit behind the Sultan’s interaction with alchemists. By this I mean the well-documented and studied infusion of the eastern Mediterranean market with counterfeit coinage from Western Europe starting around the turn of the seventeenth century.

As Şevket Pamuk notes, “with the disappearance of [the *akçe*], varieties of European coinage

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127 According to Şevket Pamuk’s calculations, prices in Istanbul “during the first quarter of the seventeenth century [in terms of grams of silver were] at approximately 80 to 100 percent above their levels in the base year of 1489-90.” Pamuk, *A Monetary History of the Ottoman Empire*, p. 150. Pamuk, while recognizing the contribution of New World silver to the rise of prices in the Ottoman world, places less emphasis on it than Ömer Lütfi Barkan, whose two articles on the subject argue that New World silver was the primary reason for the so-called Price Revolution: Ö. L. Barkan, “XVI. Asrın İkinci Yarısında Türkiye’de Fiyat Hareketleri,” *Belleten* 34 (1970), pp. 557-607, whose revised version was translated by Justin McCarthy: Ö. L. Barkan, “The Price Revolution of the Sixteenth Century: a Turning Point in the Economic History of the Near East,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 6 (1975), pp. 3-28.

128 One should not overlook the implications of the Sultan’s financial problems for his personal hold on power either: he had established his authority in Istanbul and in the provinces through the swift use of capital punishment and the prestige he accrued from successfully fighting foreign wars, both of which required the continued appeasement of the military establishment. The loyalty of the army could not be taken for granted in an age when the Sultans themselves had become dispensable figures within the expanded base of the Ottoman ruling class.


moved in to take its place.”

Minted primarily in Italy and France, these counterfeits imitated established gold and silver coinage and were primarily copper in content. Textual and numismatic evidence alike indicate that the counterfeit coinage problem became endemic in the Levant, as European traders shipped millions of these coins to Ottoman port cities where they were either exchanged with the local currency at highly profitable rates or, even more disastrously, purchase goods and services. The local responses to the problem, once it was identified, were not as naïve as the older Western scholarship would suggest: a case in point is the ill-fated Emir Fakhraddin II ibn Ma‘an of Lebanon, who had evidently attempted to counter the debased European coins by issuing counterfeited coinage of his own. The English traveler, and future treasurer of the Virginia Company, George Sandys, observed in 1614 that the Emir “hath coined of late a number of counterfeit Dutch dollars, which he thrusteth away in payments, and offers in exchange to the merchants so that no new Dutch dollars, though never so good, will now go currant in Sidon.” The daughter of the Emir had indeed witnessed a transmutation of some kind in her native Sidon after all, one that involved minting counterfeit “silver” coins from copper. With the stakes so high, and counterfeit coinage driving up the prices further to dangerous levels, Murād IV was apparently keen to perfect the art of debasing coins. It was not that the Ottoman central government had not resorted to such methods previously, but these attempts had caused more trouble than they were worth. European minters, on the other hand, had been able to introduce counterfeit coinage that were by all indications accepted by the

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131 Pamuk, op. cit., p. 131. There is no agreement among scholars as to what had prompted such a drastic debasement of the Ottoman silver coinage. Pamuk argues that the fiscal difficulties faced by the central government were the primary cause: ibid., p. 137.

132 The Ottoman administrative sources, on the other hand, strangely do not mention this long-lasting and economically devastating development: ibid., p. 346.

general public in much of the Levant for decades. This was the sort of expertise which the Sultan sought unsuccessfully in the alchemists whom he offered patronage in the last two years of his reign.

Whether or not the economic problems that beset the Ottoman world starting in the late sixteenth century had a direct impact on the growing popularity of alchemy (as evidenced by the unprecedented number of translations, abridgements, and original compositions seen in this period) is a more interesting question. We should recall once again that the crisis of the seventeenth century had been preceded by a period of population expansion and, at least for some in the Ottoman world, a growing affluence—one can only speculate that the visible flourishing of certain segments of the population, even as others suffered from the adverse effects of price increases may have led some to seek their fortunes in the alchemical arts. Indeed, there was a strong correlation between accumulated wealth and alchemy in popular imagination in the Ottoman world and many affluent individuals were believed to have acquired their fortune thanks to their alchemical knowledge. The Meccan scholar Quṭbaddīn an-Nahrawālī (d. 1581) who famously wrote an account of his mission to Istanbul, where he had been sent by the sharīf of Mecca to seek the replacement of an Ottoman official, noted that Yahyā Çelebi (d. 1571), one of the most important religious scholars and mystics of his age and a close confidant of Süleymān the Magnificent, was suspected of having a knowledge of alchemy due to his generosity and apparent wealth.¹³⁴ A similar suspicion surrounded Muḥammad Demirdāsh, one of the leading Khalwatī mystics of early sixteenth-century Cairo. With the death of Demirdāsh in 1524, many Cairenes speculated that a great treasure would be uncovered at his dervish lodge,

where government officials had allegedly found alchemical tools and equipment. The links between the accumulation of wealth and alchemy cut across confessional lines and could be equally found among the Muslims and non-Muslims: in an earlier period, when the Armenian Bishop of Amid built a richly endowed refectory to feed travelers and the poor around the middle of the fifteenth-century, the talk of the town was that the bishop practiced alchemy. While such figures, who evidently led an austere lifestyle, could be expected to become the objects of suspicion when they openly displayed their means and wealth (if only to perform charitable deeds), even those who held lucrative government posts were thought to practice alchemy if their riches exceeded those of their own social stature. Koca Sinān Pasha (d. 1596), one of the greatest Ottoman statesmen of the sixteenth century and the conqueror of Yemen, is one such example, and was widely believed to have practiced alchemy owing to his great fortune.

Even if we cannot conclusively prove or disprove that the popularly held views linking material wealth with the knowledge of alchemy had spurned an interest in alchemical literature,

136 This comes from an Armenian colophon that is dated 1449: “He, with the help of Christ, built such a dining hall that people from all nations came there and ate, drank, and carried away plentiful victuals...Some said that he possessed a k'emiay, and many said that he had found a treasure.” See A. K. Sanjian, Colophons of Armenian Manuscripts, 1301-1480 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard, 1969), p. 212. I am grateful to my friend and colleague Thomas Carlson for this colophon and his translation thereof. The alchemical traditions of Armenians (and for that matter, Greeks and Jews) are unfortunately outside the scope of this dissertation, but it should be emphasized that this branch of knowledge had an appeal for a cross section of the Ottoman society: in Ottoman Egypt, it was a Coptic bishop and his son whose enthusiasm for alchemy caused their guest, Sicard, some trouble: “The good bishop thought me so skilled in this art [of alchemy] that I was offered by his nephew, who was a priest, to learn the secret of making gold (de luy apprendre en secret la maniere de faire de l'or). I told him everything that I could, for the listening of this uncle and nephew, and that I never studied except the science of salvation and that this was the only science necessary for a clergyman. They were not too happy with my answer and, so that I do not aggravate their resentment, my friends advised me not to stay longer time in the diocese of the prelate.” See Claude Sicard, Oeuvres 2, pp. 65-66, cf. Febe Armanios, Coptic Christianity in Ottoman Egypt, p. 218, fn.146 for comments and the translation of this passage.
137 See Hulusi Yavuz, Kâbe ve Haremeyn için Yemen’dede Osmanlı Hâkimiyeti, p. 90 and fn. 82. It is interesting to note that Sinān Pasha and the aforementioned Meccan scholar Nahrawalī had a connection, in that the latter had been a companion of the Pasha in Mecca through the year 1570 after the conquest of Mecca. Nahrawalī’s history of Yemen, al-Futūḥāt al-‘Ummāniyya li ʾl-aqāṣār al-Yamāniyya (later partly reworked to be entitled al-Barq al-Yamānī fīʾl-fāḥ al-ʿUth mānī) was commissioned by Sinān Pasha and relied on his account for the Ottoman conquest of the region. J.R. Blackburn, “al-Nahrawalī.” Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition. Brill Online, 2012.
there is evidence suggesting that some Ottomans actively sought out individuals whom they believed to have alchemical powers out of financial motivations. Two decrees, recorded in the mühimme defteri (literally, “the register of important events” in which all outgoing decrees from the Ottoman court were recorded) for the years 1558-60, are illustrative of the kinds of interactions between commoners and those who professed to practice alchemy. The first decree, which is undated, had been addressed to the bey of Bolu in northwestern Anatolia, ordering him to arrest a person simply known as the kimyâger (“alchemist”) and who dressed as a dervish. The alchemist in question was known to have been collecting gold from the people of Viranşehir, for unspecified reasons, but most likely to either teach alchemy or with promises to duplicate the gold. Either way, he had already proven himself to be a con man in the eyes of the Ottoman authorities. The second decree was sent to both the bey and the Muslim judge of Kastamonu, also in northwestern Anatolia in the summer of 1560. This was apparently a response to an earlier letter sent by the bey of Kastamonu, who announced the arrest and confinement of an alchemist at the Kangırı (Çankırı) castle.

The alchemist in question was known as Remmâl Meḥmed (Meḥmed the Geomancer) who had come to Rum from the Maghreb and promised “to teach the science of alchemy, so that you may find treasures” (‘ilm-i kîmyâ oğredevîn ve defîne bulverisin). The association of ‘ilm-i kâf (i.e. kîmyâ/alchemy) with the ‘ilm-i mîm (i.e. maṭâlib/treasure-finding) stretched back to much earlier times, stemming from the fact that “creating” precious metals was the objective of the latter and one of the aims of the former. The kind of alchemy in which the Maghrebi

139 Ibid., p. 649, no. 1463.
140 Locating spells for hidden treasures were especially popular—the links between the occult science of treasure finding and alchemy appear to have been formed in Egypt, almost certainly before the Islamic period. Egypt, the imagined birthplace of alchemy through human artifice (as opposed to the God-given transmutational powers of the prophets and holy men), was also home to some of the most impressive treasures in this part of the world, a fact that
proposed to instruct the people of Kastamonu seems to be directly related to the science of finding hidden things, a specialization that fits well with his alleged mastery of geomancy. Meḥmed must have sufficiently impressed the locals as he collected a considerable amount of gold from interested parties, some of whom were asked to contribute as much as two hundred gold coins to him. Despite having been arrested in short order, he managed to escape from the castle of Kastamonu, only to be captured again soon afterwards. The decree orders the alchemist to be kept at Čankırı under guard until a second notice. Considering the relative close proximity of these locations, all clustered within the northwestern and northern corner of Anatolia, as well as the likely chronological closeness of the decrees, and their contents, it seems very probable that the two alchemists in question were one and the same. The first decree must have preceded the initial arrest of Remmāl Meḥmed. What is striking in this chain of events is that many of the locals believed in the power of alchemy to produce riches to the point of making a rather risky investment with their life savings. It appears that Meḥmed himself was the archetypal alchemist-swindler who defrauds the gullible. The swindler figure, as we have observed previously, was as prominent in the imagination of those learned elites who rejected alchemy as the “alchemy addict” who wasted a fortune chasing the unreachable goal of metallic transmutation.141

The tragic fates of Ma’anẓāde’s daughter or the Maghrebi alchemist were very likely to have strengthened a commonly held view among the alchemists of the Islamic world, which was that the intersection of alchemical knowledge and secular authority rarely produced good results. The older Islamic and Ottoman-era alchemist-authors alike frequently implored their readers to never reveal what they have learned with respect to the practice of the art to the ruling class. Just

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must be considered in contextualizing the science of treasure finding. See Okasha El Daly, *Egyptology: The Missing Millenium. Ancient Egypt in Medieval Arabic Writings* (London: Cavendish, 2005), pp. 31-44.

141 Concerning Sheikh Taqiyuddīn ibn Daqiq’s interest in alchemy, for example, Tāsköprüzāde writes: “he was addicted (mubtalā) to the art of kimya, and spent his life and his property on that path.” *Mevzū‘ ātu ‘l -‘ulūm*, vol. 1, p. 369.
as the commoners were not to be trusted with divine knowledge, because their interest in alchemy was presumed to be based on greed, the powerful were equally dangerous as they desired to use alchemists to oppress their subjects. For the adept alchemist, isolation (both from the commoners and the rulers) was the recommended course of action, as a verse in the Turkish alchemical poem Divān-i ḥikmet urges: “if you are wise (‘arīfīseñ), retreat to uninhabited places (tenhā yīre kāc) like Jābir did.”142 When some of the viziers of the Ottoman Sultan Meḥmed IV expressed an interest in Sheikh ‘Oṣmān Atpazarī’s expertise in alchemy, he shunned them, according to his more famous disciple Ismā‘īl Hakki Bursevī, stating poignantly that rulers have no fidelity (vefā).143 Those alchemists who put themselves in a position where they either served or had frequent social interactions with political authorities were seen as putting not just their integrity, but also their very lives on the line. The case of Mu‘ayyaddin aṭ-Ṭughrā‘ī was perhaps the most famous among, and frequently recounted by, later alchemists who saw in Ṭughrā‘ī’s demise the dangers of being involved in worldly affairs that involved the powerful. That Ṭughrā‘ī had died owing to his political affiliation was categorically rejected by the Mamluk sage Jaldakī in particular, whose re-conceptualization of the vizier’s downfall as one related to his alchemical expertise would be accepted by all Ottoman alchemist-authors.144 This version of

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142 Divān-i ḥikmet, Istanbul MS TY 7016, 10a. The couplet in full, Barmakī gibī şehīd olur ‘avāma kārīṣān, ‘arīfīseñ yūrī Cābir gibī tenhā yīre kāc (He who associates with the commoners is martyred like Barmakī, if you are wise flee to uninhabited places), plainly speaks of the dangers of associating with the commoners, and the prescribed action, as well as the use of the word ‘avām/‘awām in alchemical works, suggests that this group includes anyone who is not wise. Jābir was believed to have been offered patronage and support by the Barmakid family of viziers in Abbasid Baghdad. The tragic fall of the family from grace is often associated with their acquired knowledge of alchemy, and the resulting accumulation of great wealth, by later alchemist-authors. See for example Jaldakī, NT, p. 415. Our couplet is yet another example of this particular historical memory on the part of Muslim alchemists. On Jābir and the Barmakids and the former’s seclusion after the see Ahmad Y. Al-Hassan, Studies in al-Kimya': Critical Issues in Latin and Arabic Alchemy and Chemistry (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 2009), p. 14.

143 This exchange was narrated by Ismā‘īl Hakki Bursevī in the context of the composition of Ghāyat al-muntahāb, one of the lost alchemical writings of his sheikh ‘Oṣmān Fażlī (d.1691). Another work on alchemy by the sheikh survives: Hidāyat al-mutaḥayyirīn, Süleymaniye MS Esad Efendi 3491, fols. 92-122.

144 NT, p. 414: “Al-Ṭuğrā’ī’s murder had nothing to do with his Vizierate, as is generally supposed: it was due to the jealousy of those who knew that he had achieved success in the Art and were, therefore, afraid that he might deprive them of their worldly possessions.”
the story was perhaps also influential in the emergence of another: ‘Alī Çelebi, who had, as previously noted, consciously fashioned his works and his own life story alike on that of Jaldakī, had also claimed that his teacher’s teacher, the Cairene mystic and alchemist ‘Alī al-Marjūshī, had been executed by (Ḫā’in) Aḥmed Pasha, the rebellious Ottoman governor of Egypt, because he had refused to reveal the secrets of alchemy to the governor.145 These and other, similar, stories were used as warning signs to the possessors of alchemical knowledge to use their powers inconspicuously, and retain a safe distance from political authorities who might force them to misuse these powers. Following a convention already set by earlier works, Ottoman alchemical texts are accordingly replete with warnings to keep the secrets of the art hidden from the uninitiated, lowly and high-ranking alike, to protect both the society at large and the individual practitioner from the potentially disastrous results of making infinite wealth readily available to those who rule. The Turkish alchemical poem Divān-ı ḥikmet, whose every subsection ends with such a warning, concludes rather forcefully with the well-known Arabic adage: ash-shohratu āfatun: “fame is a catastrophe.”146

Conclusion

The reign of Murād IV coincided with the culmination of two trends that had originated in the late sixteenth century: one was the exponential growth of an alchemical textual tradition among the Ottoman Rumis. The other was a combination of political, demographic, environmental, and especially economic crises that affected not just the Ottoman Empire, but many other parts of the early modern world. Between these two trends, the actual practice of alchemy could not go unaffected. Some of the impetus for the former must have stemmed from

146 Divān-ı ḥikmet, Vienna MS AF 327, fol. 37b (marginalia).
an amplified interest in practical alchemy that was in turn given momentum by the multiple crises of the long seventeenth century. The next chapter will focus on the ways in which alchemical knowledge was conceptualized and put into action by Ottomans in such trying times.
CHAPTER TWO

Nine layers of the elixir:
Ottoman alchemical theory and practice in context

Even as alchemical knowledge came to be understood as a vehicle for all kinds of profound transformation, including the biological and the spiritual, in disparate cultures and scientific traditions, the notion that base metals could be transformed through human agency into precious ones remained as its foundational claim to fame. Metallic transmutation was not only the ubiquitous goal of alchemists, but also the source from which its other aims and definitions sprung. Much as the transmission of Arabic alchemical knowledge had a foundational impact on the practice of alchemy in Western Europe, a similar process shaped how metallic transmutation was theorized and practiced in the Ottoman world where the learned elite, unlike in Europe, had access to older authorities without the need of translations.¹⁴⁷ Within this Arabic textual tradition, the works attributed to Jābir ibn Ḥayyān are of fundamental significance, as the Jabirian corpus established some of the basic paradigms within which alchemical operations were to be carried out in the Islamic world.¹⁴⁸ From the theory of how metallic substances come into being in the natural world to the ways in which this process could be replicated or tinkered

¹⁴⁷ The appearance of Turkish translations indicates a widened interest in alchemy, one that was not limited to the learned Rumi elites whose Arabic was sufficient to understand difficult texts and more importantly use this language to compose equally difficult works in verse or prose. See above, fn. 33.
¹⁴⁸ Ottomans scholars were certainly aware of the debates about the historical Jābir, thanks to the Arabic bibliographical tradition, starting with the discussion of the subject in Ibn an-Nadīm. It is also clear, however, that his existence was generally accepted—if there was a dissenting opinion in the Ottoman world, it has left no textual evidence. Ṭāskopfrzāde, for example, accepts the very numerous works bearing Jābir’s name as conclusive proof for his existence: Mevāzū ’ātu ’l-’ulām, vol. 1, p. 369. For a summary of the modern scholarly debates on the historical Jābir and the Jabirian corpus, as well as an important intervention in this debate, see Syed Nomanul Haq, Names, Natures and Things: The Alchemist Jābir ibn Ḥayyān and his Kitāb al-Abhār (Dordrecht and Boston: Kluwer, 1992), pp. 3-32.
with, Ottoman alchemists of all periods owed greatly to Jābir and his later followers, especially the Mamluk sage Jaldakī. And yet, just as the works of Jaldakī have been shown to exhibit important, if subtle, modifications and elaborations of certain ideas propagated by the Jabirian corpus, the Ottoman alchemical tradition did not subscribe wholesale to earlier currents of thought in Islamic alchemy. The primary aim of this chapter is to demonstrate that a number of crucial innovations had been introduced to both theoretical and practical alchemy in the early modern period by Ottoman alchemists. While not intended to be exhaustive, the present chapter’s investigation of the contents of major Ottoman alchemical texts contributes to a growing body of studies that challenge the pervasive view of early modern Islamic science as one that was categorically derivative and stagnant. Since there already exists a well-developed literature on alchemy in the classical period of Islam, I will primarily dwell on its aspects that are of relevance for the discussion of alchemy in its Ottoman context. Let us begin with one of the major innovations of the Jabirian corpus, namely the sulfur-mercury theory.

The origin of metals

Writing in 1954, Manuchehr Taslimi, whose study of the Nihāyat at-talab is to this day the only extensive examination of a work from the writings of Jaldakī, subscribes to the still current narrative of stagnation and decline in Islamic learning: “...Jildakī is an outstanding exponent of the age when the scientific activities of Muslims had reached its zenith and begun to decline, when Europe was just awakening and its cultural influence had not as yet been felt in the East.” NT, p. viii. It is interesting to note that some of the ideas and emphases of the Nihāyat at-talab revealed in this valuable study belies Taslimi’s statement that “Jildakī, unlike Jābir and Razī, made no original contribution to chemical theory or practice.” NT, p. vii. As Taslimi himself notes, Jaldakī “was by no means a blind follower [of Jābir]:” from his consideration of animal parts as a highly unlikely source for the elixir to the way in which he interpreted the four elemental qualities more as abstractions (like Aristotle) than as concrete bodies, as well as his understanding of amalgamation as a type of transmutation, Jildakī had clearly developed an approach to the science of alchemy that was his own. Whether or not any of this constitutes an “original contribution to chemical theory or practice” depends less on the ideas themselves and more on the individual historian’s conceptualization of notions such as “original” and “contribution,” in addition to how one frames “chemical theory/practice.” If by the latter, we are supposed to envision a progression of ideas that somehow lead to the birth of modern chemistry, then Jildakī may appear to be a less impressive and important figure than Jābir or Razī in the annals of modern science; on the other hand, if evaluated within the context of his own milieu, or, more crucially, for his impact on the practice of alchemy in the early modern Ottoman world, Jildakī proves to be as important if not more so than his celebrated predecessors.
Among the most prominent of Greek influences on the eclectic cosmology of the Jabirian corpus is Neoplatonism, from which the concept of emanations had been adopted. Like the late antique Neoplatonists, to the last representatives of whom the author(s) of the Jabirian corpus was close both chronologically and geographically, the Jabirian cosmology proposed a physical universe that had ultimately “emanated” from the One (\( \text{al-wāḥid}; \text{Gr. to hen} \)), the first of the three hypostases, by way of the other two, first the universal intellect (\( \text{al-‘aql al-kullī}; \text{Gr. to nous} \)), and then the universal spirit (\( \text{ar-rūḥ al-kullī}; \text{Gr. to pneuma} \)). The final stage of emanations is the emergence of all substances (\( \text{jawāhir} \)) in the macro- and the microcosmos, including the “mineral kingdom.” The origin of metals, a subset of the mineral kingdom (\( \text{‘ālam al-ma‘ādin} \)), resembles those of the other two created kingdoms, plants (\( \text{‘ālam an-nabatāt} \)) and animals (\( \text{‘ālam al-ḥayawān} \)) in interesting ways, as we shall shortly observe.\(^{150}\) For now it will suffice to note that each metal ore was thought to emerge from the union of two basic elements, the quintessential sulfur, the masculine element, and the quintessential mercury, the feminine element—the product of this union, whose sexual nature is self-evident, subsequently grows within the earth, which acts as the womb.

Since all metals are the product of sulfur and mercury, albeit in different proportions, it follows that all metals are essentially the same. While the sulfur-mercury theory was advanced by the Jabirian corpus itself, the notion that metals came into being underground, as a result of the mixture of vapors and fumes can be traced back to Greek philosophy: these vapors and fumes, the Aristotelian exhalations, in turn were engendered by the four elements, fire, earth, water, and air deep in Earth’s bosom. Beginning in the eighth century, the Greco-Arabic translation movement had made works such as Aristotle’s *Meteorology* available for a new

\(^{150}\) See below, pp. 88-90.
audience.\textsuperscript{151} It was in part thanks to such translations that the \textit{ikhwan aṣ-ṣafā}, the Brethren of Purity, were able to compose their famous encyclopedic epistles in tenth-century Basra, in effect producing an exhaustive synthesis of the Greek scientific knowledge.\textsuperscript{152} Their eighteenth epistle, which is concerned with mineralogy, faithfully transmits the ideas of Greek natural philosophy on the origin of metals.

Jābir, however, was to refashion this extant theory as his own by suggesting that the mixture of vapors and fumes gave rise to mercury and sulfur. In other words, he had introduced an intermediary stage to the origin of metals, which was the first step towards establishing an intricate scientific approach that would weave together many other branches of knowledge (including astronomy, science of the letters, numerology, musicology etc.) and enable alchemists to investigate the constitution of metallic bodies as we will observe shortly below. The “mercury” and “sulfur” whose union produces metallic substances are, I should clarify, not the same as the mercury and sulfur found in nature: they are rather quintessential substances that have characteristics that most closely resemble mercury and sulfur—according to another

\textsuperscript{151} On the Arabic translations of Aristotle’s Meteorology, as well as this work’s Arab commentators, see Paul Lettinck, \textit{Aristotle’s Meteorology and its Reception in the Arab World: With an Edition and Translation of Ibn Suwār’s Treatise on Meteorological Phenomena and Ibn Bājja’s Commentary on the Meteorology} (Brill: Leiden, 1999), and especially pp. 301-14 for a discussion of “exhalations within the Earth.”

thought, these two parents of metals are in fact “potential mercury” and “potential sulfur” which had come together before they could realize this potential.\textsuperscript{153}

What renders the offspring of “sulfur” and “mercury” either gold or lead, or some other metal, are not any intrinsic differences between them, but rather certain accidental qualities that arise from the celestial forces at the time of the union. More specifically, the respective positions of the seven planets (i.e. the five observable planets, Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn, in addition to the Sun and the Moon) are taken to be the decisive factor, and the proximity of the Sun to the Earth is of particular importance as its heat determines the exact nature of the potential sulfur as it unites with the potential mercury. Thus, just as the positions of the stars influence certain characteristics of a new-born human baby, there is a similar impact on a new-born metal ore. Under the most agreeable celestial conditions, the sulfur that bonds with mercury has the purity necessary to grant a metal ore the elementary qualities of gold: hot and humid in perfect balance. The association of elemental qualities with various metals had been put forth much earlier, in the Hellenistic period, by the Alexandrian school of Greco-Egyptian alchemists who utilized Aristotle’s pairing of the four qualities (hot/cold, dry/moist) with respect to the four elements (fire, earth, air, and water), in order to explicate the origin of the metals.

The ideas advanced by the Jabirian corpus, however, were much more complicated than a mere adoption of the Alexandrian model. One of these was the application of elemental qualities (\textit{ṭabāʾiʿ}) to the sulfur-mercury theory, under which the qualities were brought into the new-born metal by both sulfur, the male component which is hot and dry, and mercury, the female component which is cold and moist. This extension of the Alexandrian model to the sulfur-mercury theory was perhaps what necessitated an accounting for the other two qualities that were

\textsuperscript{153} \textit{NT}, p. 412.
present at the union of the two components. The solution to this problem is arguably the most significant novelty of the Jabirian theory for the origin of metals, which was that each metal not only exhibited a pairing of accidental qualities externally, but also had a diametrically opposed pairing of qualities internally. To once again use the example of gold, while it was supposed to have the qualities of hot and moist on the outside, it also, and crucially, has the qualities of cold and dry on the inside. In other words, each metal ore that was externally gold had the dormant qualities of lead (cold and dry). As one might suspect, this external-internal division of metals’ qualities would have a far reaching impact on later generations of Muslim mystics who read, and wrote, alchemical texts with a particular concern for their own journey to spiritual perfection.

The establishment of the sulfur-mercury paradigm in the Jabirian corpus had provided not only a scientific explanation for the natural generation of metals, but also, more importantly, a methodology by which this natural process could be manipulated by alchemists. There is little doubt that the wide acceptance of this paradigm among the learned circles of the medieval Islamic world was made possible in part by those followers of Jābir who carried out their alchemical operations based on the assumed veracity of his sulfur-mercury theory. By the beginning of the Ottoman period, the notion that all metals originated from the union of sulfur and mercury had become, for all intents and purposes, scientific orthodoxy. While most alchemical texts were arguably too technical to command a large readership within this nascent Ottoman world, the popularization of the sulfur-mercury theory in the previous centuries meant that its basic outlines were available in a wide variety of literature concerned with the natural sciences in general.

A work that was briefly mentioned in the preceding chapter illustrates this case rather well. The Hikmetnāme (“Book of Wisdom”) is a lengthy Turkish encyclopedia in verse that
covers such diverse topics as religious knowledge, history, natural sciences, and geography among many others. It was composed in 1488 by Ibrāhim ibn Bālī of Antep (‘Ayntāb), a city that was geographically within northern Syria, and less than a 100 miles north of Aleppo, but one that was also in close proximity to the major Turkish urban centers of fifteenth-century Anatolia. In 1516, just eighteen years after Ibn Bālī wrote the Ḥikmetnāme, Antep would pass from Mamluk to Ottoman rule. While its author was bilingual in Arabic and Turkish, and despite having been written in a Mamluk milieu (Ibn Bālī’s patron was no other than the Mamluk Sultan Qayitbāy after all), the Ḥikmetnāme found a ready readership in the lands of Rum owing perhaps to the fact that its author had been sent as the Mamluk emissary to Istanbul and, above all, to the language of its composition. In it, we do not find explicit references to the science of alchemy, but rather a synthesis of certain ideas from the Jabirian corpus, especially relating to the origin of the metals and the properties of precious metals such as gold and silver, and those of precious stones such diamonds. On the origin of metals, ibn Bālī writes:

“They say that the vapors underground / are forever trapped along with the fumes with the slow passage of time / that stone changes color within the mines… if the vapors overcome [the fumes]…/ by God’s will it becomes mercury / if there are more fumes [than vapors]… / it becomes either salt (milh) or vitriol (zāc) or sulfur (kibrūt) / [or] sal ammoniac (nūşādir), mark my word: when sulfur fuses with mercury (zībak) / the seven metals are born.”

In a few short lines, the Ḥikmetnāme (“Book of Wisdom”) provides what was certainly, at least among the learned men and women of the Islamic world in this period, the standard account for the origin of metals, which had its roots in Greek natural philosophy, but had been substantially elaborated upon by Jābir and his followers. A work that would have been available to an even wider audience, Țaşköprīzāde’s Mevżū’ātu’l-‘ulūm, also expresses the prevailing opinion among

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154 What little is known about the life of Ibrāhim ibn Bālī comes from his own sole surviving work, see Ali Şeylan, “İbrâhim ibn-i Bâlî’nin Hikmet-nâme’si (149b-300a)” (Ph.D. Dissertation, Istanbul University 2003), pp. 14-17.

Alchemists that the union of sulfur and mercury is the root of all metallic substances, and that some among them attempt to combine these two substances with great heat and thereby achieve “what would have taken a thousand years in nature.”

As “late” as the nineteenth century, many learned Ottomans continued to regard sulfur as the father and mercury as the mother of all metals. By this time, however, the Jabirian model for the origin of metals co-existed with further elaborations thereto. One of these was the addition of “salt” to Jābir’s sulfur-mercury paradigm by the fifteenth-century Swiss philosopher, physician, alchemist, and prophet Paracelsus. In the late seventeenth century, Paracelsian iatrochemistry would engender a short-lived, but nonetheless remarkable, iatrochemical movement within the Ottoman world, especially among the elite physicians of the capital. Owing to the (partial) translation efforts of Ibn Sallūm, the Aleppine chief physician of Meḥmed IV, the ideas of Paracelsus, through the intermediary of his seventeenth century followers such as Oswald Croll (d. 1609) and Daniel Sennert (d. 1637), had been made available in Arabic to an Ottoman audience. Turkish translations of Ibn Sallūm’s Arabic synthesis followed later in the seventeenth and the early eighteenth centuries. The Ottoman iatrochemical movement, unlike that initiated by Paracelsus, did not entail a rejection of Galenic medicine—the Ottomans, as noted by a number of studies on the subject, were content to incorporate the Paracelsian use of mineral

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156 Taşköprüzade, Mevzû 'átu 'l- 'ulûm, vol. 1, p. 372.
(and especially mercurial) remedies to combat new diseases such as syphilis without abandoning their own medical paradigm. Almost all of the major participants of the Ottoman iatrochemical movement were first and foremost physicians, only a few of whom betray any practical interest in alchemy. On the other hand, it is also clear that the circulation of Paracelsian texts in Turkish and Arabic had created, on the part of Ottoman physicians, a heightened awareness of their own society’s alchemical tradition—it is noteworthy that it was to the AÇ corpus, and not the writings of Paracelsus on alchemy, these physicians would turn for answers to their questions.  

To once again return to the sulfur-mercury-salt theory, it seems to have found some adherents among the Ottoman alchemists as it makes an apperance in a number of late Ottoman alchemical manuscripts. This hardly surprising as “salts” were not only of great importance in Jabirian alchemy, but had also been set apart from sulfuric and mercurial substances by Rāzī, whose ideas had almost certainly influenced those of Paracelsus. Salts were included in another, and to my knowledge heretofore unnoticed, account for the origin of metallic substances. The introductory theoretical section of the [Kitāb] Durar al-anwār fī asrār al-ahjār,

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159 Istanbul University MS TY 7021, fol. 13a: “the origin [of metals] is three things, mercury, sulfur, and salt” (...aşlı üç şeydir, zībaq ve kibrīt ve milh). The statement is found between two Turkish alchemical treatises in the manuscript, Kamerū’l aḵmar kešfū’l esrār (“The Moon of Moons, Revealing of Secrets”) and Şerh-i dehn-i seyf (“Explanation of the Oil of the Sword”). The former work was apparently very popular among Ottoman alchemists as a significant number of its copies have survived to the present, some of which have been ascribed to ‘Alī Çelebi, for example in Mevlana Museum MS 2794, fols. 222a-230a, wherein its author is “Eşrefoğlu.” For the figure of Eşrefoğlu as “new author,” see Chapter 4. Since the Şerh-i dehn-i seyf mentions syphilis (frenk zaḥmeiti), it is possible that the compiler of the manuscript was familiar with iatrochemistry, which would explain the mention of the salt-mercury-salt trinity for the origin of metals.

160 The translations of Rāzī’s works were available in the university library of Erfurt (and part of the curriculum), where Paracelsus had studied under the German humanist Rufus Mutianus (d. 1527) for some time. See Hugh D. Crone, Paracelsus: The Man who Defied Medicine (Melbourne: Albarello Press, 2004), p. 29.
one of the more extensive books from the AÇ corpus, states “that all metallic matter, in the beginning of their genesis, consists of” (innā kullī jawhar ma’danī fī bad’hi at-takwīnihi mushtamil ‘alā) seven things: vapory wateriness (al-māʾīyat al-bukhārīya), earthy fuminess (ad-dukhānīyat al-arḍīya), saltiness (al-milḥīyat [sic]), luminous stoniness (al-ḥajarīyat annūrānīya), mercurialness (az-zibaqīya), sulfurity (al-kibritīya), and materialness (al-jasadānīya). From the subsequent discussion, it is clear that ‘Alī Çelebi considered these constituents neither as abstractions (like the Aristotelian elemental qualities) nor as concrete bodies (as imagined by Jābir of the same), but rather as the stages of metallic generation.

Vapours, or vapoury wateriness in ‘Alī Çelebi’s terminology, had been considered as the origin of metal ores since classical antiquity as we have already observed. The ubiquitous references to the Qur’anic verse “[we created] from water every living thing” (21:30: min al-māʾi qulla shayyin ḥayyin) in Islamic alchemical texts serve to both provide prophetic backing to this theory and underline the notion that the world of minerals mirrors those of vegetables and animals. The “earthy fuminess” that follows the initial layer, or stage, is also of ancient pedigree. It is noteworthy that ‘Alī Çelebi incorporated Razī’s addition of salt to Jabirian sulfur-mercury theory—the early stages of metallic generation in the Durar al-anwār thus reflect, in some ways, the layers of scientific thinking in the Greco-Arabic tradition on this issue, starting as it does with Aristotle’s exhalations, and is then followed by Razi’s revision of Jābir’s theory. The final layer, that of materialness, is further and a rather obvious evidence to the effect that these were indeed stages of development according to ‘Alī Çelebi.

The schema also allows us to observe one of the distinguishing features of the AÇ corpus, namely the leading role assigned to the macrocosmos, and astronomy, to understanding the

161 Durar al-anwār fī asrār al-ahjār, Millet MS Ali Emiri Arabi 2842, fol. 4a.
workings of the microcosmos. It goes without saying that planetary influences had always been taken into consideration by alchemists, since at least the late antique period, both for the natural generation of metals as we have already noted, and in the carrying out of alchemical operations. The AÇ corpus, however, goes farther than even the writings of Jābir and Jaldaki, to systematically integrate the knowledge of the celestial spheres for the practice of alchemy. There is reason to believe that ‘Alī Çelebi had made a conscious effort to develop this aspect of his approach, perhaps to distinguish himself from past alchemists, because his *Kashf al-asrār fī hatk al-astār* (“The Unveiling of Secrets through the Tearing of Veils”) faithfully reproduces the Jabirian sulfur-mercury theory, while the *Durar al-anwār fī asrār al-ahjār* (“The Luminous Pearls for the Secrets of Stones”), written several years later, expands it as described above.\(^{162}\)

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\(^{162}\) Although ‘Alī Çelebi himself did not utilize a visual diagram, his description of the stages of metallic substances’ formation, as well as that of the layers of the elixir constitute a textual diagram that enables the readers to imagine a visual representation of each. On diagrams in Islamic scientific texts, see Ahmet T. Karamustafa, “Cosmographical Diagrams,” in J. B. Harley and David Woodward, eds., *The History of Cartography, Volume 2, Book 1: Cartography in the Traditional Islamic and South Asian Societies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), pp. 71-89.
Figure (i). The constitution of metallic substances according to ‘Alī Çelebi.

More evidence to support our argument that the celestial spheres occupy a most prominent place in the AÇ corpus will be provided below—at the present moment, I will point out the obvious and note that the seven constituents of metals proposed by ‘Alī Çelebi correspond to the seven planets. It is almost certain that this arrangement was the result of a desire to account for exactly how planetary influences shaped the formation of metals: under the Jabirian model, these influences were recognized, but not systemized. In the *Durar al-anwār*, each planet governs one of the constituents-cum-stages: wateriness originates from the influence (*min ‘aththar*) of the Moon, fuminess from that of the Sun, saltiness from Mars, luminous stoniness from Jupiter, mercurialness from Mercury, sulfurity from Venus, and materialness
The last of these is of special interest. While materialness is a concrete substance, it is also obviously intended as the final stage before the emergence of a metal. The association of materialness with Saturn, whose traditional position in the seventh celestial sphere (i.e. the upper/outermost among the planets) is also indicative of this line of thought. The generation of the metallic substance in this model follows that of the celestial spheres more strictly than any other known in earlier Islamic alchemical thinking, while by and large retaining the latter’s prioritization of the stages of development. It is the moon, for example, the first of the celestial spheres, that influences wateriness. Jupiter, the most auspicious (as-sa’d al-akbar) of the planets in astrology, appropriately governs the luminous stoniness of metals.

‘Alī Çelebi had readily accepted the traditional pairing of the seven planets with the seven metals. In the Kashf al-asrār fī hatk al astār, which was composed at the most three years before the Durar al-anwār, he employs this notion to determine the amount of time necessary for the materialization of each type of metal under natural circumstances. Gold materializes in nineteen years, lead in thirty, tin in twelve, iron in fifteen, “Chinese iron or mercury” (al-ḥārṣīnī [sic] ’aw az-zība) in twenty-five, silver in eight, and copper in eight years. These corresponded to the Ptolemaic planetary cycles (dawr), the Sun’s, governing gold, being nineteen years, Saturn, governing lead, thirty years, and so forth for each planet. That ‘Alī Çelebi was familiar with Ptolemy’s ideas, through the Arabic Almagest or perhaps the abridgements thereof, is also apparent by his mention, in the chapter of the Kashf al-asrār on planetary conjunctions, of the number of fixed stars as 1022, as well as the Ptolemaic classification of stars according to the magnitude of their brightness (15 stars of the first magnitude, 45 of the second, 163

163 Durar al-anwār, fols. 4a-b.
208 of the third, 474 of the fourth, 217 of the fifth, and 49 of the sixth).  

With this we come to the conclusion of our discussion of the origin of metals according to the Jabirian corpus, and the development thereof by ‘Alī Çelebi in the Ottoman period. The pervasiveness of the macrocosmos in the alchemical thinking of the latter will be revisited throughout the rest of the chapter, but let now us turn to the subject of metallic transmutation itself.

**Remedies for ailing metals**

We have already seen that a central feature of the Jabirian sulfur-mercury theory, as well as of its later variations and re-formulations, is that the qualities of metallic bodies are merely accidental. The Islamic alchemical tradition frequently drew parallels between these accidental qualities and (the humoral understanding of) diseases that upset the natural composition of the human body—just as a skilled physician could cure sickness by restoring the balance of the latter, alchemists could reduce or bolster any of these accidental qualities to cure metallic bodies of their impurities. There was not, however, a single method with which such cures could be realized—even the elixir (*al-iksîr*), the subject of alchemists’ greatest theoretical and practical efforts, was not deemed absolutely necessary for transmuting metals.

The realization of metallic transmutation without the use of elixirs was known as the “minor operation” (literally “the small gate,” *al-bāb aṣ-ṣaghīr*). In the minor operation, metals

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166 The notion of “balance” in metallic substances and the imagination of gold as being in perfect balance, was of great relevance not only in the Islamic, but also in other alchemical traditions. It is therefore all the more important that, as Syed Nomanul Haqq has noted, Jābir thought differently on this matter: “Gold is no more in equilibrium than any other metal and it is distinguished only by its utility.” That this idea, found in one of the best known works from the Jabirian corpus and therefore readily accessible, was for all intents and purposes ignored by later alchemists of the Islamic world, including some of the most ardent followers of Jābir, attests to the power of the image of gold as the perfect metal. See Haqq, *Names, Natures, and Things*, pp. 95-96.
are simply purified by various treatments (tadābir) and “mixed” (tamzīj) with another. This is a lesser path not only in the sense that the changes in the base metal required long and arduous labor, but also that a significant amount of precious metals are required. We may speculate that much of practical alchemy in the Ottoman world in fact followed the basic principles of what sages labeled the operation, which must have struck non-practicing observers as simple fraud when the alchemists simply treated base metals to change their color, such as when copper was whitened to have the appearance of silver. It is noteworthy that the premier example of an Ottoman “laboratory notebook,” the eighth chapter of the early seventeenth-century Mecmūʻatü'l-mücerrebāt is concerned exclusively with the minor operation, without designating it as such. In other words, the author (or authors) of the Mecmūʻatü'l-mücerrebāt did not deem the treatments described therein as a minor path—there is no place here for a hierarchy of the methods of transmutation, which occupies such an important place in the alchemical literature produced by the self-styled elite sages of the Jabirian tradition. In the writings of the latter, and befitting its position at the bottom of the hierarchy of operations, the minor operation was associated with the mineral kingdom: just as the latter is the lowest stage of created substances on earth, below the vegetable and animal kingdoms, so does the minor operation with respect to the middle and great operations of the practitioners of Jabirian, who, after all, saw their art as the re-enactment of the divine act of creation.

167 Kashf al-asrār, Süleymaniye MS Hacı Selim Ağa 881, 184a.
168 It will be remembered, for example, that the daughter of Ma’anzāde’s efforts in Diyarbekir focused on the treatment of copper so as to turn it into silver. The next step in the operation would be the transformation of the silver into gold. In his Seyāhatnāme, the Ottoman traveler Evliyā Çelebi describes the export of sulfuret arsenic (zırnī-ı asfer) mined near Ahlat, a city on the western shores of Lake Van, to all points in the Islamic world, as well as Christian Europe (Firengištān), where alchemists (ehl-i kīmyā) used the sulfuret arsenic to turn copper into gold. See Evliyā Çelebi, Seyāhatnāme, vol. 4, 242a.
169 A typical operation from the eighth chapter of the Mecmūʻatü'l-mücerrebāt, which concerns the “turning” of copper into pure silver, is described as a “valid operation” (saḥīḥ ‘amel) that, more importantly, produces “certain” (yakīn) results with “minimal hardship” (zaḥmeti āz).
The availability of a lesser path notwithstanding, the creation of the elixir—also known as “the tincture” (aṣ-ṣibāgh) and “the venerable stone” (al-ḥajar al-mukarram; i.e. the philosophers’ stone)—remained as the ultimate goal of alchemist-philosophers. It did so both by virtue of its supposed effectiveness in perfecting bodies (human and metallic alike) and because its very existence was meditated upon by mystics for whom the elixir illuminated their own individual journeys to spiritual perfection. Since all bodies in the physical universe were thought to consist of one or more of the four elements (water, earth, fire, and air, the last of which is often called “oil” in the Islamic alchemical literature), it followed that all bodies could theoretically be reduced to their constituent natures of hotness, coldness, dryness, and moistness. As is well known, these natures were not identical with their Aristotelian counterparts and were rather conceptualized as physically extant. Once extracted, the four natures could then be combined and stabilized to produce the elixir necessary to transmute one kind of metallic body to another. As such, not only minerals, but also vegetables and parts of animals (including humans) could be used to produce the elixir. This was without a doubt one of the most important innovations of Jabirian alchemy, as the use of vegetables and animals is unattested in Greco-Egyptian alchemy that had preceded it.

That vegetables, animal parts, and minerals alike could be used to create the elixir did not necessarily mean that there was a consensus among the alchemists about which substances were ideal for this task. Jabir provides a long list of various factions (ṭawāʿif) who favored one substance, or a combination of substances, over the others. A selective reading of the Jabirian corpus itself must have given some later alchemists the sense that the human body was the best source for cultivating the elixir: it is clear, for example, that the Ottoman sage ʿOṣmān Bīlānī

170 The departure of Islamic alchemy on this issue from the Aristotelian view of natures can be traced to the Jabirian corpus: see Syed Nomanul Haq, Names, Natures and Things, pp. 49 and 59.
was influenced by the Jabirian corpus’ emphasis on animal substances (including humans) for the creation of the elixir. The former alchemist writes:

“It is both in me and in you, everywhere is filled with it
It is found in each person, I myself am the stone.”

Needless to say, these verses, which are part of a longer poem on the elixir, can be read in a number of ways and this was very likely what ‘Oşmān Bīlānī precisely intended. A mystic, as well as an alchemist, his verses echo the long-standing mystical interpretation of metallic transmutation as one that mirrors the spiritual journey of the human soul to perfection (the end result of which, al-insān al-kāmil, the perfect man, is corresponds to gold). Be that as it may, Oşmān Bīlānī’s prose works on the subject of alchemy reveal that he favored the human hair (sh’ar) above all other substances for the cultivation of the elixir, which allows us to interpret his alchemical poem, in which numerous couplets end with “I myself am the stone” more literally.

Hair, to which a treatise from the Jabirian corpus was dedicated, was prized by alchemists because its distillation yielded carbonate sol ammoniac (the word nushādir, introduced to Arabic and Turkish from Persian, being used for both mineral and carbonate sol ammoniac), which was otherwise scarcely available to them. The corrosive quality of sol ammoniac were ideal for treating metallic bodies, such as in the process of whitening (tabyid) and it is no doubt because of this that it was considered to be essential for the cultivation of the elixir. While Jabirian alchemy thus placed greater emphasis on animal substances, Jaldakī and his later followers,

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171 Jābir writes that ‘God made man perfect by making the Stone (i.e. the elixir) through which the Art exists a part of man’s body. The perfection and existence of the Art are because of the Stone, I mean, the Art’s operation, as well as the correct arrangement of man’s parts,” Kitāb Ustuquss al-usṣ, 63:15-18 in Peter Zirnis, “The Kitab Ustuquss al-Uss of Jabir ibn Hayyan” (Ph.D. dissertation, New York University, 1979), p. 28.

172 ‘Oşmān Bīlānī, Kaşide-i Hacerü ’l-mükerrem (”The Poem of the Venerable Stone”), Istanbul University MS TY 7025, fol. 10a, ll. 15-16: “Hem sende vär hem bende, dölüdürü cümle mekânda / Bulunur her bir insanda, meger haçer imiş kendim.”

173 ‘Oşmān Bīlānī, Untitled Treatise on Alchemy, Istanbul University MS TY 7025, fol. 65b.

including ‘Alī Çelebi, argued against giving precedence to substances such as eggs, human hair, or urine: all of these, and others, could be utilized for the elixir, in particular conditions.

The Middle and Major Operations

The utilization of the elixir to cure metallic bodies was categorized as two distinct methods. The lesser of these approaches is “the middle operation” (“the middle gate,” al-bāb al-awsaf), which brings together what is referred to as “the western mercury” (az-zibak al-gharbī) with “the eastern mercury” (az-zibak ash-sharqī) to cultivate the elixir. The former is the elixir’s “soul” (ar-ruḥ), a substance that is cold and moist, while the latter is its “spirit” (an-nafs), which is hot and dry. Thus all four natures are present in the operation, albeit coming together in pairs. A specially prepared “body” (al-jasad) is the third and final component. In the final stages of the middle operation, this body “dies,” that is the alchemist putrefies it through the agency of corrosive liquids (i.e. the divine water) and is reborn with the soul and the spirit as a “new body” (al-jasad al-jadīd).

The middle operation’s rather obvious esoteric dimensions aside, its symbolism is perhaps better appreciated in light of its close association with the vegetable kingdom in the Islamic alchemical tradition. That the death and rebirth of plants with the passage of seasons is more relevant than the bodily resurrection of human beings for the middle operation can clearly be seen in the myriad vegetative imagery used for this particular method of creating the elixir.

Indeed, the process of the production of the elixir itself was more often than not described as an

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175 Kashf al-asrār, Süleymaniye MS Hacı Selim Ağa 881, fols. 185a-b and NT, p. 310. It seems clear that Jaldakī had this operation in mind when he wrote: “...one who knows the secrets of this Art is a firm believer in the life to come; he is certain that the soul survives the death of the body, and that it transmigrates to a new body after the disintegration of the old one. And indeed the ultimate purpose of this philosophy is to prove that the Creator of all things, the source of knowledge and wisdom, is One and has no partners.” NT, p. 43.
organic process rather than a “mechanical” one: Abu’l Qāsim al-‘Irāqī’s most important work was entitled Kitāb al-muktasab fī zirā’at adh-dhahab (“The Book of Acquired [Knowledge] for the Cultivation of Gold”), in which he explicitly states that “the elixir is nothing more than cultivation” and Jaldakī, who a century later wrote a major commentary on the Muktasab, explained that the elixir grows out of the alchemically prepared “earth” when it is nourished by the “divine water” (al-mā’ al-ilāhī).176 It is no coincidence either that the word mabāqil (“vegetable garden”) was employed both in the medieval Arabic and the early modern Ottoman alchemical texts to refer to this operation: for ‘Ali Çelebi, the second layer of the “world of wisdom” (‘ālam al-hikma, i.e. “the world of alchemy”) is that of the mabāqil.177

By contrast, in “the major operation” (al-bāb al-kabīr), the elixir is “born” out of a process that is likened to the birth of animals and human beings. Thus the elixir not only granted new life to old bodies, but was itself alive. It will be remembered that the natural genesis of metals had been conceptualized in the Jabirian corpus as a sexual union between “sulfur” and “mercury.” The elixir of the great operation was similarly imagined as a new being, an offspring, that was born out of the wedding of two substances with opposing characteristics, where the female component “becomes pregnant…and gives birth to a child.”178 The Ottoman alchemical works retain this imagery, and those in the Turkish vernacular frequently refer to the conjoining parts as anā (mother) and bābā (father). The great operation gave birth to the elixir by first

176 NT, p. 402. Jaldakī writes elsewhere: “Just as the farmers multiply their seeds by cultivation, so do the alchemists,” NT, p. 119.
177 Kashf al-asrār, fol. 170a. Ibn Umayl appears to be the origin of this rather unusual term, as Jaldakī writes: “But Ibn Umayl, on the basis of his own experiments with the stone, initiated certain methods to which he gave the name mabāqil.” NT, p. 493. Jaldakī’s assessment is almost certainly based on a work composed by Ibn Umayl, whose title is Al-Mabaqil as-saba’a fi ’l-kīmīyā (“The seven vegetable gardens on alchemy”). See F. Sezgin, Geschichte des arabischen schriftums vol. 4 (1971), p. 287.
178 NT, p. 107.
reducing various substances to their natures and then bringing them together individually, wherein the pre-existence of a “body” is unnecessary.

The extraction of “natures” (ṭabāʾī’, also referred to as arkān, literally “pillars”) from a substance could be achieved through a number of chemical treatments, all of which were also employed in the middle and minor operations, but for different purposes and in ways that were deemed to require less skill and precision. Distillation (takūr), for example, removed earthiness from both liquids and solid, especially organic, materials (i.e. dry distillation); calcination (taklīs), both by fire and corrosive substances such as sal ammoniac, in a similar fashion removed moistness. The same result, albeit being chemically a different procedure altogether, was achieved for mercurial substances through coagulation (ʾaqd), which in effect solidified them. Sublimation (tāṣīd), which purified sulfur, and sulfides such as arsenic, led to the extraction of airiness (i.e. oiliness). To further disintegrate resulting materials by solution (ḥall), “divine water” (al-māʾ al-ilāhī), solvents for whose preparation sal ammoniac was a key ingredient, were employed. The natures were then “mixed” (tamzij) according to their weights (awzān) and subjected to purification (tankiyyah).

The elixir, whose creation needed the repetition of these steps numerous (in some cases hundreds of) times, matured over a varying period of time, at the end of which the most important segment of operations would begin. This was the projection (ṭarḥ) of the elixir on a much larger body of metallic substance: if the elixir was one of whiteness, for example, a small amount of it would be projected on a suitable metal, such as copper, which would then “turn” (qalb) into silver. Admittedly this has been a rather brief and simplified summary of some very complicated sets of chemical procedures concerning the details of which alchemists themselves appear to have disagreed greatly among themselves. The sheer variety of operations for
achieving similar results was an object of criticism by alchemy’s opponents, and the very frequent employment of the Prophetic saying ḍḥābī k’an-nujūm, biayyahim aktadaytumu aḥtadaytum (“My companions are like the stars, whoever among them you follow, you will be rightly guided”) in Ottoman alchemical texts obviously aimed to dispel such criticisms.179

The science of the balance

While both the middle and the great operation cultivated and grew the elixir, the latter was believed to require the greater knowledge, expertise, and wisdom on the part of the alchemist. ‘Alī Çelebi states in his Kashf al-asrār that although he had performed the middle operation with the guidance of his teacher Sheikh Aḥmed Şārūḥānī, it was Jabir ibn Hayyan and Jaldaki who enabled him to perform the major operation.180 The Jabirian corpus was of particular importance, and not just for the great operation, for it established a comprehensive system under which the aforementioned “weights” of natures could be calculated. The “science of the balance” (‘ilm al-mīzān), as this system is known, was essential for both cultivating the elixir and for ascertaining the deficiencies and excesses in a given metallic body. Only after the weights of these natures were known could the alchemist turn to the main task of reducing or increasing them as necessary to cure the metallic body.

Much to the anguish of Jābir’s learned followers in the Ottoman world, the science of the balance employed an impossibly complicated numerological system to compute the weights of

179 This hadith, based on its numerous chains of transmission, is often considered of “fair” authenticity. The chains, numbering a total of seven, can be found in Aḥmad ibn Ḥājar, Al-Kāfī al-shāfī takhrīj ahādīth al-kashshāf (Beirut: Dar Ihya’ al-Turath al-‘Arabi, 1997), 4:94.
180 Kashf al-asrār, Hacı Selim Ağa 881, 186b. According to the same passage, ‘Alī Çelebi had successfully completed the middle operation, “between forty and fifty days.”
hotness and coldness, dryness and moistness in bodies. This was the first step towards the transmutation of one kind of body to another kind in a stable condition, which was a critical task, for if the new body was unstable, it would be unable to retain the qualities that characterized it. The stability of all metallic substances, in turn, depended on their qualities maintaining an equilibrium that was expressed in the number 17: “The form in everything is seventeen.” Each metal was balanced only when its coldness, hotness, moisture, and dryness conformed to this number or its multiples, by maintaining a ratio of 1:3:5:8 (the total of which is 17). Much has been written on the significance of this number for Jabirian alchemy since the issue has been first brought to wider scholarly attention by Paul Kraus almost seven decades ago. It was another historian of alchemy, however, and Kraus’ British contemporary, Henry Stapleton who provided the most convincing argument by linking the number and its constituent ratio to a particular magic square whose origins could be found in ancient China:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>4</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure (ii). The magic square of 3

The magic square of 3, also known as the Lo Shu square, was the most important such diagram in the ancient world, and had subsequently given rise to the popularization of similar diagrams in India, the Islamic world, and Europe. As an important divinatory tool, its “magic” is to be found in the number 15, which is the result of all vertical, horizontal, and diagonal additions of each

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181 Haq, *Names, Natures and Things*, p. 175.
three consecutive squares. Stapleton argued that Jābir’s 1:3:5:8 ratio stemmed from the four numbers in the lower left grouping of four squares within the Lo Shu square. More recently, Syed Nomanul Haq has noted that the rest of the numbers within this magic square add up to 28 (4+9+2+7+6), another numerical value of great significance for Jabirian alchemy.

The four qualities (i.e. hot/cold, dry/moist) of Aristotelian elements were theorized to have four degrees of intensity in Galenic medicine, which enabled an elaborate application of elemental qualities to both bodily humors and drugs. Jābir adopted Galen’s four degrees of intensity for his own purposes and further divided each degree into seven (yet another significant number for all esoteric sciences, its importance being based on the number of observable planets), thus giving us 28 positions in total, which is also the total of the numbers other than 1, 3, 5, 8 in the Lo Shu square as we have just seen above. The real importance of the number 28 for Jabirian alchemy, however, is that it is also the number of letters in the Arabic alphabet. By expanding Galen’s four degrees of intensity to 28 possible positions, Jābir was able to assign a letter of the Arabic alphabet to each position according to the abjad order, rotating between hot, cold, dry, and moist. In the Kitāb al-ahjār ‘ala ra’y Balīnās (“The Book of Stones According to the Opinion of Balīnās”) this complex system is explained rather simply: “alif is for hot, bāʾ is for cold, jim is for dry, and dāl is for moist.” This was repeated, in order, for each of the next four letters in the alphabet, ending with the letter ꞌ (ghayn), which is moist (see the table below).

The letters themselves were no mere place-holders, and their relationship vis-à-vis the natural qualities constituted, as Syed Nomanul Haq puts it, an “ontological equivalence” between

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183 H.E. Stapleton, “The Probable Sources of the Numbers on which Jabirian Alchemy was based,” Archives internationales d’histoire des sciences (1953), pp. 44-59 and “The Gnomon as a possible link between one type of Mesopotamian Ziggurat and the Magic Square Numbers of which Jabirian alchemy was based,” Ambix 6 (1957).
185 Ibid., p. 187.
the 28 letters and the four qualities.\footnote{Ibid., p. 84.} As a result, “the science of the letters” (‘ilm al-ḥurūf) would become an indispensable part of alchemy as it was theorized and practiced in the Islamic world.\footnote{Despite the fact that it was one of the characteristics that clearly set Jabirian alchemy apart from Western medieval and Daoist Chinese alchemy, until the studies of Henri Corbin and more recently of his prolific student Pierre Lory, the role of letter-magic in the Islamic alchemical tradition had been conveniently ignored.} Since the degrees of intensity depended on the position of these letters in the name of a given body, in order to compute the “weights” (awzān) of a body’s qualities, one had to first and foremost analyze its name. That necessitated, in turn, ascertaining the true name a body, which at first appears to pose a distinctive difficulty especially for metallic substances which often had multiple names even within the same language. The metal tin, which is specifically discussed by Jābir, for example, was known as al-qala‘ī, an-naṣāṣ, qaṣdīr, and al-mushtarī (the planet Jupiter, which is associated with tin). While Jābir ultimately singles out another name, zāwus, the Arabic rendition of Zeus (Jupiter), for the computation of the weight of tin’s qualities, he also notes that qaṣdīr is a valid choice.\footnote{Haq, *Names, Nature and Things*, p. 185.} This is because he believes that both words exactly mean “tin” unlike al-qala‘ī—Jābir rather conveniently does not discuss whether or not al-mushtarī and an-naṣāṣ accurately describe the metal in question, but it is clear that for him the meaning of the word is of paramount importance and thus his computations can be extended to any language.

Using Jābir’s system, we can find the supposed weight of tin’s accidental qualities. While the Jābirian corpus uses the units dirhams, danaqs, and qirdts in calculations, following Nomanul Haq’s example, I will express all weights in danaqs, a single unit of which is 1/6 of a dirham, or approximately 0.2 grams. It bears repeating (as Jābir himself is wont to do) the
importance of the number 17 and the 1:3:5:8 ratio once again before we proceed, as the weights in each of the seven subdivisions illustrate.\(^{189}\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>First/1</th>
<th>Second/3</th>
<th>Third/5</th>
<th>Fourth/8</th>
<th>Hot</th>
<th>Cold</th>
<th>Dry</th>
<th>Moist</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grade (martaba)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>56</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degree (daraja)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>24</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minute (daqīqa)</td>
<td>2½</td>
<td>7½</td>
<td>12½</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second (thāniya)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>16</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third (thālitha)</td>
<td>1½</td>
<td>4½</td>
<td>7½</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fourth (rābi‘a)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fifth khāmisa</td>
<td>½</td>
<td>1½</td>
<td>2½</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Table (i). The weights (awzān) of four natures in substances.

Taking the name zāwus (زاؤس) as our starting point for the computation, we see that the letter “ز” which is the first letter of zāwus, has 3 dānaqs of dryness in the first degree. The second letter of the word, “ا” has 21 dānaqs of hotness in the second degree. The third letter, “و” has 15 dānaqs of coldness in the third degree. Finally, the final letter “س” has 16 dānaqs of dryness in the fourth degree. In sum, tin is supposed to have 21 dānaqs of hotness, 15 dānaqs of coldness, and 19 dānaqs of dryness, a ratio of 21:15:19:0. Needless to say, this does not conform in any shape or form to the 1:3:5:8 ratio championed by Jābir and accordingly does not have a relationship with the number 17. As it turns out, very few bodies, metallic or otherwise, do! Jābir resolved this contradiction by noting that these computations concern only the weight of a body’s external

\(^{189}\) Table (i) is a simplification of the one devised by Jābir, see ibid., pp. 136-37.
qualities. If taken together with the latent, hidden, qualities, of a body, the resulting weight would be a multiple of 17 and conform to the 1:3:5:8 ratio. The weights of these latent qualities were not factored in according to the table above, simply because they did not have a name—they were rather worked out backwards, and through intuition, with the assumption that the total weight would be a multiple of 17. The seemingly endless pages of calculations found in many alchemical manuscripts from throughout the Islamic world are concerned primarily with this Herculean task of determining the balanced state of metallic substances and the additions and subtractions necessary to transmute them into other metals.

Alchemy, cosmology, and ‘Alī Çelebi

The alphanumeric system established by “the science of the balance” was not simply a computational tool, but rather a key aspect of the Jabirian corpus’ cosmology. The aforementioned eclecticism of this cosmology, which was heavily influenced by Neoplatonism as we have already noted, also incorporated elements of Neopythagoreanism. The links between Neoplatonism and Neopythagoreanism are well-known, with the latter having shaped some of the ideas of the former’s early proponents. It should also be noted that Apollonius of Tyana was a leading figure in the renewal of Pythagoreanism in late antiquity and it is of course (pseudo-) Apollonius, or Balînâs, from whom Jabir had supposedly adopted his alphanumeric system. Revered as the “first sage” (al-ḥakîm al-awwal) in the Islamic esotericism, Pythagoras features prominently in the Epistles of the Brethren of Purity, especially in the mathematical construct of the universe and the centrality of music, or more specifically, musical proportions in the Brethren’s cosmology. Thus many of the ideas ascribed to Pythagoras found their way into Islamic philosophy and esotericism through a variety of sources, including but not limited to the
Epistles of the Brethren of Purity and the Jabirian corpus.\textsuperscript{190} In Jaldakî’s \textit{Nihāyat at-ţalab}, he is most memorably depicted as having ascended to the celestial spheres, where the heavenly sounds emanating from the spheres inspired him to create the science of music upon his return—Pythagoras’ bodily ascension to the celestial spheres exhibits an interesting parallel with Muḩammad’s night journey and ascension (\textit{mi’rāj}) that remains, to my knowledge, unexplored.\textsuperscript{191}

Concerning the mathematical construct of the universe advanced by (neo-) Pythagorean philosophy, it should be evident that it had not been adopted wholesale by the author or the authors of the Jabirian corpus: although numbers are of great importance, both because of their association with letters (and sounds) and due to the centrality of a particular number (17), it is the letters that constitute the foundational blocks of the physical universe. The links between Jabirian alchemy and “the science of the letters” are as important as those between alchemy and astrology/astronomy: indeed, both sciences were deemed indispensable for the successful practice of the art.\textsuperscript{192} Lettrist doctrine, while attracting primarily an elite following, was by no means a fringe branch of knowledge among the Islamic esoteric sciences: its high status stemmed in part from the Qur’an itself, wherein the existence of the so-called disjointed or initial letters (\textit{al-ḥurūf al-muqattā’at} or \textit{al-ḥurūf al-fawāth} respectively) with which many sūrahs cryptically begin, inspired the ‘ulemā and mystics alike to reflect on the significance of the

\textsuperscript{190} The proto-Shi’i dimension of Jābir’s cosmology was in some respects inseparable from his Neoplatonism, and was the root of no small scholarly debate in the previous century, owing to Paul Kraus’ characterization thereof as Isma’ili and the resulting problematics of chronology and authorship of the corpus.

\textsuperscript{191} Jaldakî writes: “Know that Pythagoras was the first teacher (\textit{al-mu’allim al-awwal}) among the Sages, for he derived his knowledge from Hermeses…but this did not satisfy him, he exerted himself strenuously until he soared high and heard the movements of the spheres producing sounds the like of which may not be heard here below.” \textit{NT}, p. 258.

\textsuperscript{192} They are among the sciences enumerated by IbnWaḥshiyya, for example, that are deemed necessary for the successful practicing of alchemy in his ‘\textit{Uṣūl al-ḥabīr}. Jaldakî, on the other hand, singles out astronomy as being the most essential for sages, along with alchemy itself: \textit{NT}, p. 176.
letters of the Arabic alphabet. In the Ottoman period more specifically, the great occultist and mystic ‘Abdurrahmān al-Bisṭāmī had acted almost as a “missionary” of lettrist doctrine, having written important treatises on the subject and trained students in its practice throughout the fifteenth-century Ottoman world (d. 1454). His travels in the Ottoman Empire coincided with the arrival of missionaries in the real sense of Fażlallāh Astarābādī (d.1395), the martyred founder of Ḥurūfism, from Persia. The difficulty of distinguishing the practitioners of ‘ilm al-ḥurūf from hurūfīs is a well-known problem in the historiography of lettrist doctrine, and this is a pitfall I would like to avoid. Manuscripts containing alchemical works occasionally also include treatises on the science of the letters—at the same time, the former often discuss the properties of Arabic letters and/or magical alphabets. I believe that this focus on letters in the Islamic alchemical literature has more to do with the importance attached to them in the Jabirian corpus, and does not necessarily indicate an adherence to hurūfī teachings.

Letters and letter symbolism does open another can of worms, however, which can hardly be avoided: how much of the Jabirian corpus’ Ismaili cosmology, and imamology, was embraced, or even tacitly accepted by later alchemist-authors of the Islamic world in general, and of the Ottoman one in particular? For one, it can be argued that the Jabirian writings that primarily deal with these themes have been of greater interest to modern scholars than to the Ottoman practitioners of alchemy. One such short work, whose foray into imamology is through

193 On these letters, see “al-Kur‘ān,” EI 2.
196 Bisṭāmī himself is the perfect example of an “orthodox” Sunni scholar who was also a lettrist, but not a hurūfī by persuasion. Certain Bektashi practitioners of the science of the letters pose more of a problem as many Bektashis were known to have been drawn to the doctrine of hurufism. See ibid., p. 121.
letter symbolism, is the Kitāb al-majīd (“the Book of the Glorious”).\(^{197}\) In his study of this book, Henry Corbin famously made the case for a relationship between the three letters that are the book’s main subjects, ‘ayn (ع), mim (م), and sin (س), and three archetypes. The letters ‘ayn (ع), mim (م), and sin (س) are identified as three historical figures of great significance for Ismailism, namely (‘)Alī, (M)uḥammad, and (S)almān, respectively. Much more importantly, Corbin argues that, above and beyond these historical figures, the letters refer to their archetypes: thus ‘Alī, the first Imam according to the Shi’a, and Muhammad’s cousin and son-in-law, is the “silent one” (aṣ-Ṣāmit) who not only represents esoteric knowledge, but is also the one who keeps that knowledge hidden. Muḥammad, the Prophet, is “the utterer” (an-Nāṭiq), the one who proclaims exoteric knowledge. The esoteric and the exoteric are two aspects of divine truth that would remain separate, because by their very nature one is mute and the other vocal, but they are not inseparable.

The third figure, Salmān al-Fārisī, the renowned Persian companion of Muḥammad, was held in special esteem by the Ismailis.\(^{198}\) Just as the historical Salmān was believed to have explicated the hidden knowledge of the imam to other companions after the Prophet’s death, Salmān the archetype is the solitary mediator (al-Yatīm) between the silent one and the utterer.\(^{199}\)

The Ismaili thought that permeates this particular book is interesting in and of itself, and for that

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\(^{198}\) On the significance of Salmān al-Fārisī for the Ismailis in particular, see Shafique N. Virani, The Ismailis in the Middle Ages: A History of Survival, a Search for Salvation (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 61. A popular saying attributed to the Prophet, “I am the city of knowledge and ‘Alī is its gate,” which is, as we will note later in this dissertation, quoted frequently in Ottoman and other alchemical texts, finds an interesting follow-up in one Ismaili poem: “Turn your back on the wasteland of times astray, For the way to ‘Ali’s gate by the light of Salman I found!” See ibid., p. 61. Together, Muḥammad, ‘Alī, and Salmān constitute a “cosmic trinity” in both the Ismaili and other “heterodox” Shi‘i traditions, such as that of the Nusayrīs: on the latter, see Matti Moosa, Extremist Shiites: The Ghulat Sects (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1987), p. 342.

purpose Corbin’s study is an excellent guide. I would argue, however, that even the Kitāb al-
maiṣīd, one of the many books from within the Jabirian corpus that does not deal explicitly with
alchemy, can be read as a discourse on transmutation. Indeed, we need not stretch our
imagination to connect these archetypes to Jabirian alchemy: we have already observed how the
Jabirian corpus made the external‐internal qualities of metals the cornerstone of its teachings
about the make‐up of all bodies and the art of transmutation. With that in mind, it is possible to
characterize the outward properties of bodies as their mīm, while their hidden nature is the ‘ayn.
The sīn, then, is the true goal of the sage, the substance that affects both the exoteric and the
esoteric properties, its mīm and its ‘ayn, of a body—in other words, the elixir. This interpretation
would also be in line with the Jabirian corpus’ conceptualization of the “world of the
elixir/alchemy” as the mesocosm between the macrocosm and microcosm, the conduit that links
the celestial spheres with the world of man.

The notion of mediation between two related but physically separated realms was also of
central importance to another concept Jabir, among numerous other influential Muslim sages of
the medieval period, had borrowed from late antique Neoplatonism. This is the well‐known
correlation between the macrocosm and the microcosm, between the universe and the world of
men, the relationship of which is often summarized with the formulaic “the above from the
below, and the below from the above,” whose source is the famous Tabula Smaragdina, or the
Emerald Tablet, an alchemical text attributed to Hermes. From Jābir to Jaldakī, the
macrocosm (al‐‘ālam al‐kabīr) was unequivocally the realm of the celestial spheres, while the

\[\text{200 For Corbin, the treatise’s alchemical content pertains to a “technique spirituelle.” Ibid., p. 196.}
\[\text{201 The Arabic “original” of the Emerald Tablet was discovered within two works, Jābir’s aforementioned Ustuquss}
\text{al-uss, and another version in Sirr al-khaliqa ("The Secrets of Creation") of Balīnās/pseudo-Apollonius, by}
\text{Holmyard and Ruska respectively. I think it would not be wrong to assert that the Emerald Tablet as a text figured}
\text{larger in the imagination of Western alchemists, even as the aphorismic contents of this work were influential in the}
\text{Islamic tradition as well.}
microcosm (al-ʿālam aṣ-ṣaghīr) that of men. As Corbin noted, the very idea of these two realms, while having pre-Islamic origins, was strengthened through the adoption of Qur’anic verses, such as (41:53): “We will show them Our signs in the horizons (fīʾl-āfāqī) and within themselves (fī anfusihum) until it becomes clear to them that it is the truth,” wherein “the horizons” and “the human beings” were taken to designate the macro- and the microcosm. Between them, however, is the mesocosm (al-ʿālam al-awsāṭ), which links the macrocosm and the microcosm.202 In the Ismaili tradition in particular, this middle world is “prophetic theosophy,” which pertains to the “Ismaili initiation”—in the case of Jābir, it can be argued that the latter is intimately connected to divine knowledge, in other words, alchemy.203 In the Ottoman AÇ corpus, this tripartite division of the physical universe is retained, but with a most significant alteration: it is the world of man (ʿālam al-insān) that is situated in the middle, that is the mesocosm, while “the world of divine art” (i.e. al-kīmyā) is the microcosm.204 The rationale behind this, I believe, concerns the conceptual relationship between the macrocosm and the microcosm—in Jābirian cosmology, divine knowledge is the mediator between man and the heavens; for ‘Alī Çelebi, on the other hand, it is rather the human being himself who connects the celestial spheres with “bodies”


204 Durar al-anwār, Millet MS Ali Emiri Arabi 2842, fol. 2b; cf. Süleymaniye MS Hacı Selim Ağa 881, fol. 133a: “[Know] that the world other than God is three worlds according to the sages: the first is the macrocosm, this is the universe (al-kāʾīnār), and the second is the mesocosm, and this is the world of man (ʿālam al-insān) and the third is the microcosm, and this is the world of the divine art (aṣ-ṣīnāʾat al-ilāhiyya).” It is noteworthy that ‘Alī Çelebi employs the authority of unspecified sages on this matter, even as this particular rendition of the three realms is his own.
(ajsād) that constitute the world of kīmyā.205 The divine art is imagined not as a link, but rather as a world of its own that resembles the celestial spheres. ‘Alī Çelebi’s exposition on “the layers of the elixir” is particularly illuminating in this regard.

‘Alī Çelebi proposes an intriguing, and original, stratification for this world of divine art, whose “layers” (tabaqāt) mirrors that of the celestial spheres in reverse order. Thus the first layer of the world of kīmyā corresponds to the ninth celestial sphere: the former encompasses every possible alchemical arrangement under the minor, middle, and great operations, precisely because it is the “true elixir” (al-iksīr al-ḥaqq) that exists only within the ‘ālam al-mithāl (“the realm of images,” mundus imaginalis), having no “existence” as such in the ‘ālam al-jawāhir (“the world of bodies”).206 Just like the ninth celestial sphere, which lies outside the sphere of fixed stars, it consists solely of the “secret archetypes” (al-asrār al taḍ‘aīf). The second layer of the world of the divine art encompasses all elixirs that are cultivated (the use of the term mubāqil is noteworthy), without taking into account the weights of their natures. This layer corresponds to the eighth celestial sphere, the sphere of fixed stars. The relationship between the two is clear: just as only God knows the true number of stars, so are the elixirs of this layer, which are virtually innumerable. ‘Alī Çelebi continues to equate the other layers of the world of the divine art with the celestial spheres, in ways that would make perfect sense to the learned investigators of the natural world in his day. Hence the third layer, which is that of the humlānāt (“bodies adulterated with alloys”) whose defining operation is the blackening of bodies before the

205 Jaldakī summarized this idea in the following manner: “The Sages referred to the Art as the ‘Middle World,’ distinguishing it from the ‘Upper World’ i.e. the world of the heavens or the ‘Great World,’ and the ‘Lower World,’ i.e. the world of man or the ‘small world.’ Stationed in the middle of the upper and lower worlds, the world of the Art embraces all the mysteries in both of them.” NT, p. 526.

completion of the elixir, corresponds to the sphere of Saturn, the inauspicious and black planet, associated with melancholy and adversity in the Greco-Arabic tradition.

It should be pointed out that this stratification, and its subsequent equivalence with the celestial spheres, would have been less compelling had ‘Alī Çelebi not replaced the traditional place allocated to the world of the divine art with relation to the macro- and microcosmos. As it is above, so is below. That the layers of the world of kīmyā are matched in reverse order with the celestial spheres is of particular significance, as the former reaches down to the mesocosm, the world of man according the AÇ corpus, whereas the latter reaches outwards to the same. The relationship between the world of kīmyā and the heavens becomes especially meaningful only if the former is the microcosm, rather than the mesocosm as per the Jabirian corpus.

More importantly, ‘Alī Çelebi’s re-imagining of the macrocosm, mesocosm, and microcosm is also a clear departure from the ideas put forth by Jaldakī, which otherwise permeate much of the AÇ corpus. Having said that, I do believe that Jaldakī, or more precisely ‘Alī Çelebi’s interpretation of his writings, had been decisive in the development of the said re-imagining in the corpus. Jaldakī declared that there are two major branches of knowledge which all sages should know intimately, “the science of astronomy” (‘ilm al-hayat) and “the science of principles [of the lower world]” (‘ilm al-ahkām).\textsuperscript{207} According to him, the sages must use their knowledge of the former to have insight into “the world of generation and corruption.” It seems likely that in ‘Alī Çelebi’s interpretation, this world of generation and corruption was the world of kīmyā, rather than the world of men.

\textsuperscript{207} NT, p. 176-77: “There are two main sciences: one of them is the science of Astronomy, which deals with the phenomena of the heavens, and the other is the science of the Precepts, which treats the phenomena of the lower world. And these two sciences yield two results. One of the two results is the Art which gives wealth and satisfaction to all people alike, and enables them to appreciate the immensity of the power of God. The second result is the acquisition of freedom to employ spiritual powers, and it is, therefore the more important of the two.”
The emphasis placed on the macrocosm for the understanding and manipulation of the microcosm, the world of the divine art, in the AÇ corpus is in accordance with ‘Alî Çelebi’s particular approach to the art. We have already seen how he had revised the traditional theory for the origin of metals so as to match each planet to a particular constituent of metallic bodies. Moreover, the greater part of one of his most important books had been devoted to the discussion of the qirānāts (planetary conjunctions), whose importance for alchemical operations was recognized in Islamic alchemical tradition, but had never been given such extensive treatment by an alchemist-author. As we have just noted, the selective reading of authoritative works on alchemy would have been sufficient to lead ‘Alî Çelebi to give precedence to astronomy over all other sciences for the practice of alchemy. The corpus does suggest, however, another source, which is all too often ignored in studies of Islamic alchemy, the Qur’an.

The tacit dismissal of both the Qur’an and the ahadith (deeds and sayings attributed to Muḥammad) in the historiography of Islamic alchemy is especially palpable in scholarly studies that are concerned with the technical aspects of this branch of knowledge. Needless to say, those which focus on the mystical and/or philosophical dimensions of alchemy, such as the works of Henri Corbin and Pierre Lory, do seriously consider how the religious views, and knowledge, of alchemists had shaped their practice of the art. Once we step out of the literature of “Ismaili studies,” however, there is very little in the way of how Sunni Muslim alchemists incorporated their religious views within their practice of the art. This is especially problematic as Ottoman alchemical writings are rich in both Qur’anic imagery and the use of ahadith, indeed too abundant to enumerate here.208 I will simply point out that one of the most important Turkish alchemical poems, the Kaṣīde-i Sīr-i Tā-Hā (“The Poem of the Secret of Tā-Hā”), is in fact

208 Two hadiths, “My companions are like the stars…” and “I am the city of knowledge and ‘Alî is its gate” have already been mentioned in this capacity.
named after the twentieth surah of the Qur’an, the sūra Ṭā Ḥā.\textsuperscript{209} This sūra was an important source of inspiration for Muslim alchemists, not only because it begins with the abovementioned “opening letters,” which are the central focus of the first part of this poem’s commentary, but also because it narrates the famous encounter of Moses with the Pharaoh and his magicians.\textsuperscript{210} The “staff of Moses” was a popular symbol in Islamic alchemical writings on account of its transformation into a snake. Another symbol derived from this surah is the “white hand” (\textit{yad bayḍā’}) of Moses. Prior to his confrontation with the Pharaoh, Moses is told by God to put his hand into his bosom and take it out, at which point it would be transformed into a pure/white hand. In the Islamic tradition, this action would be associated, among other alchemical operations, with whitening and the elixir of whiteness.\textsuperscript{211}

Another Qur’anic passage, from the sūrat al-Baqara, features prominently in the Turkish alchemical work \textit{Ḳamerū’l akmar} (“The Moon of Moons”), which is occasionally ascribed to ‘Alī Çelebi: “But Allah selects for His mercy whom He wills, and Allah is the possessor of great bounty.”\textsuperscript{212} The author of \textit{Ḳamerū’l akmar} claims that after continuously repeating this verse day and night, God sent him “an angel in the appearance of a man” (\textit{beşer şüretinde bir melek}) who then instructed him in the science of alchemy and its divine secrets—if the reader wishes to be guided along the true path that leads to alchemical knowledge, he or she too should constantly recite the same verse.\textsuperscript{213} Muḥammad al-Maqdisī, whose treatise on alchemy for Sultan Murād IV

\textsuperscript{209} The manuscript tradition of this poem indicates that it was one of the most popular Turkish alchemical works in the Ottoman world. Its commentary, ascribed to the fifteenth century mystic Eşrefoğlu ‘Abdullāh Rūmī, was apparently just as popular. Both works remain unedited and unstudied, a task that I hope to undertake in the near future.

\textsuperscript{210} Qur’an 20:49-72.

\textsuperscript{211} The Qur’anic depiction of this scene follows the Biblical one closely: \textit{Exodus} 4:6, “Then the Lord said, ‘Put your inside your cloak.’ So Moses put his hand into his cloak, and when he took it out, the skin was leprous—it had become as white as snow.” The white hand of Moses had become proverbial in the Islamic world for someone whose knowhow and expertise (in alchemy, medicine, etc.) seems almost miraculous.

\textsuperscript{212} Qur’an 2:105.

\textsuperscript{213} Istanbul University MS TY 7021, fol. 6a.
has been mentioned in the previous chapter, begins the first part of the Durrat al-fākhira with a verse from al-Baqara that has a similar meaning: “He gives wisdom to whom He wills, and whoever has been given wisdom has certainly been given much good. And none will remember except those of understanding.”\textsuperscript{214} The use of such verses validated the notion that true expertise in alchemy, and the revelation of its secrets, entailed –and required– much more than having access to books and an experienced instructor or indeed a thorough understanding of the art’s technical aspects and the signs and allegories employed by alchemist-authors: the alchemist had to be of pure character and intentions so as to be “chosen” by God, who simply willed His secrets to be revealed to an individual. It is only with such convictions held by alchemists that we can appreciate some of their stranger statements, such ‘Alī Çelebi’s association of the knowledge of metallic bodies within the science of the balance with the “the knowledge of revelation.”\textsuperscript{215}

‘Alī Çelebi’s Durar al-anwār ends with a note to readers that further strengthens this point and also underscores, once again, the importance of the Qur’an for Ottoman alchemists. In the conclusion of this book, ‘Alī Çelebi writes that he had attained a complete understanding of the divine secrets only after having recited the sūrat al- ’An’ām (“The Cattle”) multiple times in perfect reverence and in a state of purity. The particular reverence with which the sixth surah of the Qur’an was held in the Ottoman world is well-known, whose elaborate calligraphic copies were used both as devotional objects and protective amulets.\textsuperscript{216} For a self-styled sage, such as

\textsuperscript{214} Qur’an 2:269; Princeton University MS Garrett 1182Y, fol. 3b.

\textsuperscript{215} Sirr ar-rabhānī, Millet MS Ali Emiri Arabi, fol. 1b: i’lam inna al-‘ilm al-musammī bi’l-wahy fi’l-‘ilm al-mīzān muta’lliq bi ajad al-ma’daniyya (“Know that the knowledge named revelation in the science of the balance is concerned with the metallic bodies”).

\textsuperscript{216} The Ottoman-era En ‘am-i şerif (“The Noble ’An’ām”) originated from prayer books in which the sixth sūra of the Qur’an was the sole occupant, and hence the name. Later, other prayers and Qur’anic passages accompanied the ’An’ām, which, however, remained as the core of such prayer books. For the development of this genre and its religious and talismanic uses, see Alexandra Bain, “The late Ottoman En ‘am-i şerif: Sacred text and images in an
‘Alī Çelebi, this surah has numerous verses that would have been of great interest. It begins with the formulaic creation of the heavens and the earth by God, which is repeated in numerous other sūras, but with the significant addition of the creation of the darkness (ẓulma) and the light (nūr) to this formula (6:1). Perhaps more important for both the mystics and the practitioners of occult sciences are the references to God’s knowledge of all secrets (6:3) and of the unseen (6:59). Some of the verses would have been especially meaningful to alchemists: in God’s creation, everything is accounted for, even a grain that is within the darkness of the earth, and every moist (ratb) and dry (yābis) thing (6:59)—this is rather significantly the only verse in the entire Qur’an to mention “a moist [thing]” and “a dry [thing].” Equally important in its symbolism for alchemists is God’s power to bring the living out of the dead (yukhrīju’l-hayy min al-mayyiti) and the dead out of the living (6:95), which could be used as an allusion to the operations that cultivate the living elixir out of dead/petrified substances. Finally, to return to the subject of ‘Alī Çelebi’s heightened emphasis on the celestial sphere in his alchemical writings, the surah al-’An‘ām may have been influential, for it narrates the pre-prophetic days of Abraham, when he was actively searching for a deity to worship: he had turned his devotion first to the stars (kawākib), which disappeared in the morning, then to the moon, which set after daybreak, and then the sun, which was conquered by nightfall (6:76-79). Once again, just as was the case with moist and dry things, this surah is the only one to provide a narrative of Abraham’s contemplation of the heavens, which is not insignificant given the frequent repetition of phrases and even entire stories throughout the Qur’an.

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Islamic prayer book” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Victoria, 1999). The mention of “guardian [angels]" (ḥafaẓūr) in 6:127 was probably instrumental in the talismanic uses of the ‘An‘ām.
Conclusion

The discussion of some of the theoretical aspects of the AÇ corpus in this chapter has shown that ‘Alî Çelebi had made a serious and concerted effort to put his own stamp on the received tradition of classical Islamic alchemy. Given the frequent portrayal of sciences in the post-classical Islamic world in general, and in the Ottoman one in particular, as derivative and stagnant in past studies, it is tempting to engage in an apologetic discourse. I would like to instead point out that “originality” is a thoroughly modern concern that is hardly meaningful in the context of early modern Ottoman learned culture. ‘Alî Çelebi might as well be, and almost certainly is, a truly exceptional figure among the very numerous Ottoman alchemist-authors. It is very doubtful, however, that he had considered himself to be an “original” thinker who discovered new aspects of the divine art. The way in which ‘Alî Çelebi wrote about his own works makes it clear that he viewed himself as a “renewer,” someone who explained, explicated, and perfected the underlying principles of alchemy better than his predecessors—no small feat (or pretension) if the stature of the likes of Jābir and Jaldakî in the Islamic world is considered.
CHAPTER THREE

Establishing authorship in a manuscript culture: “the new author” and the ‘Alī Çelebi–corpus

Like many a good Ottoman story, this one begins with a dream. Meḥmed Nācī had been dabbling in alchemy since early adulthood without an inkling of success. His library was certainly not wanting in books on the subject, nor could his mystical pedigree – deemed advantageous, if not necessary, for the practice of alchemy – be called into question: his father was Sheikh Ōmer, the spiritual leader of a prestigious lodge of Celvetī dervishes in the important market town of Drama, about halfway between Edirne and Thessaloniki, during the second half of the seventeenth century.217 That ‘Azīz Maḥmūd Ḥūdāyī (d. 1628), the founder of the Celvetī Sufi order, was believed to have transmutated falling leaves into solid gold with his mere breath must have simultaneously been a great source of encouragement and frustration for the young Meḥmed Nācī.218

Yet relief was on the way. It came, as it is wont to happen, just as he was about ready to abandon his alchemical pursuits. Evidently broken psychologically and perhaps nearly broke financially, late one night he found himself being greeted in the dream world by the famous alchemist “mü’ellif-i cedīd Eşrefzāde…‘Alī Efendi.”219 After acknowledging the hardships suffered by Meḥmed Nācī through his years of unfruitful study, ‘Alī Efendi emphasized the

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217 The Celvetīyye was an independent Sufi order that emerged in the late sixteenth-century and drew on the traditions of more established orders, especially those of the Bayramiyye and the Ḥalvetīyye. For general information on the Celvetīyye and its founder, see Hasan Kamil Yılmaz, Aziz Mahmud Hüdayi ve Celvetiyye Tarikatı (Istanbul: Erkam Yayınları, 1982), especially pp. 42-78 and 231-43. The Celveti presence in Drama had likely been established in the early decades of the seventeenth century by Ḥamza Dede, one of the many disciples of ‘Azīz Maḥmūd Ḥūdāyī. A number of documents in Başbakanlık Ottoman Archives of Istanbul attest to the existence of a tekke bearing the name of Ḥamza Dede in Drama—the oldest of these documents, however, dates from 1787 and involves the appointment of a sheikh to the Drama lodge by the order’s headquarters in Üsküdar. See Cevdet Evkaf no. 401/20301. 218 Meḥmed Gūlşen Efendi, Küliyat-i Hazret-i Hüdayi (Istanbul Bahriye Matbaası, 1919-21), pp. 11-12. 219 Meḥmed Nācī, Cām ‘iʿiʿ l-esrār ve lām ‘iʿiʿ l-envār, Süleymaniye MS Bağdatlı Vehbi 1017, fols. 2a-2b.
impossibility of practicing “the art” without instruction—the hidden meanings of alchemical writings could only be unraveled with the aid of a wise teacher. This was to be the first in a series of dreams in which the long-deceased alchemist taught his designated heir from beyond the grave. The alleged oneiric instruction would allow Meḥmed Nācī to surmount the difficulties he had faced and would eventually lead him to write a number of alchemical treatises of his own, including Cām ‘īū’l-ēsrār ve lām ‘īū’l-envār (“[The Book of] Gathering of Secrets and Rays of Lights”), around the closing years of the seventeenth century.  

Whether or not one is inclined to believe the personal account of Meḥmed Nācī as narrated in the Cām ‘īū’l-ēsrār on how he was able to persevere in his studies, the story does underscore the heights of prestige enjoyed by ‘Alī Efendi, or, as he is more commonly known, ‘Alī Çelebi, amongst Ottoman students of alchemy. By the middle of the seventeenth century, dozens of books, treatises, and poems attributed to him were already in circulation, together comprising a corpus that was the largest output of alchemical texts ascribed to a single author in the early modern Islamic world. The immense reputation commanded by these works, evidenced both by a ubiquitous physical presence in manuscript libraries from Morocco to India and a well-attested textual presence in the writings of later alchemist-authors, cannot, however, be explained

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220 Three copies of this work have been preserved in Istanbul University MS T6808, Süleymaniye MS Bağdath Vehbi 1017, and Kütahya-Tavşanli MS Zeytinoğlu 307. The first two manuscripts also contain a copy of Dūrreti‘l-yetīme fi‘ t-tabī‘atī‘i‘š-šan‘aviyye (“The Unique Pearl for the Alchemical Disposition”), a second alchemical treatise by Meḥmed Nācī, who provides a chronogram in verse for the year of this text’s composition: “srr-i ū-hā, ‘abd Nācī mafham-i ḥā(k) bī riyā” (“the secret of ū-hā, the follower Nācī [reveals] the meaning of the truth without deception”) which adds up to H. 1110 (1698-9). Orthographic rules dictate that the second rā letter in srrr and the second kāf in ḥāk be indicated simply with a sign of emphasis (shadda). The fact that only the former word’s final letter was marked with a shadda indicates that the author intended only one of the kāfs in ḥāk in the chronogram to figure into the calculation. Otherwise, the date for the composition of the work would have been H. 1210 (1795-6), which postdates a copy found in Istanbul University from H. 1143 (MS T6808). For the chronogram in question, see MS Bağdath Vehbi 1017, fol. 63b.

221 Efendi, ultimately from the Greek authentēs, was a title commonly used in this period for the non-military dignitaries. Çelebi, an even more ambiguous honorific title, could simply designate a man of letters, or used as a proper title by the sheikhs of certain dervish lodges as well as various guild masters. See Encyclopedia of Islam, 2nd ed., s.v. ‘efendi’ and ibid. s.v. ‘çelebi’. After the middle of the seventeenth century, the author was also very frequently referred to as “‘Alī Beg,” beg or bey being reserved chiefly for military dignitaries. The alternating use of the titles efendi, çelebi, and bey for the author mirrors some of the historical confusion surrounding his identity.
by their sheer volume alone. Acutely aware that the writings of the Mamluk alchemist Jaldakî in the early fourteenth century had been the last great effort to synthesize the older Arabic alchemical literature, ‘Alî Çelebi appears to have consciously based his authorial authority on the notion that he was the most recent link in the chain of sages who are responsible for transmitting “divine knowledge” through time. The historical context for the successful reception of the author’s lofty claims, and indeed of these claims’ very origins, must be located in the growing self-confidence of the learned circles at the center of the Ottoman Empire before their classical Islamic intellectual heritage. Less than a hundred years after the appearance of the first texts from the corpus, the name ‘Alî Çelebi was already being uttered in the same breath as a select group of Greek and Muslim sages of the greatest repute such as Jābir ibn Ḥayyān and Jaldakî.

It is therefore fitting that the historical ‘Alî Çelebi, like Jābir himself, remains somewhat of an enigma. In fact, the very use of the name ‘Alî for the author is first witnessed decades after the appearance of the oldest surviving copies of his works, which at first circulated in complete anonymity, and then later cryptically under the epithet al-mu’allif al-jadîd or mü’ellif-i cedîd (“the new author”). The authorship of the corpus is on no firmer ground chronologically, as the tentative dates of activity widely range from the fifteenth to the early

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222 Kashf al-asrâr fi haikt al-astâr, one of the more important works ascribed to ‘Alî Çelebi is found in Hasaniyah MS 1590 in the Royal Hasaniyah Library in Rabat, Morocco. See Mohamed Sijelmassi, Enluminures des manuscrits royaux au Maroc, 23. Several Arabic works from the corpus are also found in India, see H.E. Stapleton, “Note on the Arabic Mss. on Alchemy in the Asafiyah Library, Hyderabad (Deccan), India,” Archeion 14 (1932), pp. 57-61.

223 The author of a late-seventeenth century alchemical text, to cite just one example, mentions the name of ‘Alî Çelebi in the same breath as Plato (Aflâtûn), Aristotle (Aristuṭālis), and Jābir ibn Ḥayyān, among others. See Sheikh Muṣṭafâ Sīrōzī, Miftâḥü'l-ekber ve ḥâberü'l-ekger, Süleymaniye MS Bağdatlı Vehbi 2242, fol. 2a.

224 The problem posed by Jābir ibn Ḥayyān, whose historicity has been famously rejected by Paul Kraus in his seminal article “Jābir ibn Ḥayyān: Contributions à l’Histoire des Idées Scientifiques dans l’Islam I: Le Corpus des Écrits Jâbiriens.” Mémoires de l’Institut d’Égypte 44, 1 (1943), precipitated one of the most lively debates in the historiography of Islamic alchemy when first E. J. Holmyard and then Fuat Sezgin attacked Kraus’ position. Fortunately, the most interesting line of research on Jābir today, conducted by Pierre Lory, drawing on the work of late Henry Corbin, has moved beyond the point of arguing for or against the historicity and attempts to understand what the figure of Jābir meant for Muslim mystics and alchemists in the medieval period. See especially the introductory comments in Pierre Lory, Dix Traité d’Alchimie: les dix premiers traités du Livre des soixante-dix (Paris: Sindbad, 1996).
seventeenth centuries. Even more crucial are the diverse historical attempts to identify exactly who “the modern author” was supposed to be: there was eventually a general (and unhelpful) consensus on his given name, ‘Alî, but a number of historical and quasi-historical figures were suggested by the Ottoman bio-bibliographical literature on the one hand and the copyists and commentators of the individual works from the corpus on the other.

The aim of the present chapter is not to heroically delve into a world of fading black ink, stained pages, and faceless tomes so as to excavate the “the real ‘Alî Çelebi.” It would not be impossible to construct a nebulous version, or versions, of his life story—in fact some autobiographical elements from his writings will be discussed below. Far more significant for our discussion, however, are the seventeenth-century efforts to put a face on the author-figure, and the implications of his gradual emergence out of anonymity. In other words, rather than attempting to solve the puzzle that is the authorship of the AÇ corpus, the historical significance of the puzzle itself will be probed. Contemporary scholarship on pre-modern Ottoman science has focused too much on “the author” and not nearly enough on “the reader.” This is a rather misguided approach to the production of knowledge within the context of Islamic manuscript culture in general, and that of natural sciences in particular, wherein the generations of readers of a particular work (including those acting as the writers of marginalia, copyists, commentators,

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225 Much of the confusion in modern scholarship appears to have been generated by Brockelmann, who noted (twice) that \textit{al-mu’allif al-jadīd} ‘Alî Çelebî had flourished in the 9\textsuperscript{th} century of the Hijra. See Carl Brockelmann, \textit{Geschichte der arabischen Litteratur}, II, 233 (Henceforth GAL). On another occasion in the same volume, Brockelmann takes the 10\textsuperscript{th} century as the period of activity for the author. Ibid., 447. The fact that Brockelmann uses the ‘Alî Bek/Beg variation of the author’s name in the latter entry suggests that he had consulted Kātib Çelebî’s \textit{Kashf az-zunūn} at this time. For a discussion of this variant name and the general influence of Kātib Çelebî, see below, pp. 132-34. Interestingly, the notion that \textit{al-mu’allif al-jadīd} had been active in the 9\textsuperscript{th}, and not the 10\textsuperscript{th}, century of the Hijra would also be advanced by some of his seventeenth-century Ottoman readership. See below, Chapter 4, pp. 189-90.
supercommentators, abridgers, and translators), contributed as much to its textual history as the author-figure himself.²²⁶

In the specific case of the AÇ corpus, the said approach have led modern researchers to consult the blindingly convenient Ottoman bio-bibliographical literature alone, owing to its likeminded and exclusive focus on the author-figures, in preference to exploring the ways in which the corpus’ audience had interacted with it to construct multiple identities and appropriate life narratives for its purported creator. The earliest account of the authorship of the corpus, as well as some of the major autobiographical elements that had fuelled the imagination of its readership, are the major concerns of this chapter, and will together lay the foundations for an in-depth study, in the following chapter, of the “Eşrefzâde ‘Alî Çelebi” figure that has gone largely unnoticed by historians. Our inquiry begins of necessity with the presentation of the textual and material objects on which it depends: the individual works constituting the AÇ corpus and the manuscripts in which they are found, with a particular emphasis on the earliest dated ones.

The works of “the modern author”

The term “AÇ corpus” must be understood as a designation of convenience that covers a large number of early modern alchemical writings –as many as sixty by some counts– that are, or had once been, ascribed to a single individual initially known simply as al-mu ’allif al-jadîd or mü’ellif-i cedîd in Arabic and Turkish respectively).²²⁷ The corpus is diverse both linguistically

²²⁶ For more on this issue, see below, pp. 196-98.
²²⁷ For the higher figure, see Ekmeleddin İhsanoğlu et al., Osmanlı Tabiî ve Tadbîki Bilimler Literatûrü Tarihi, vol. 1 (İstanbul: IRCICA, 2006), pp. 53-80. As one would suspect, many of these titles are in fact duplicates, pseudographs, abridgments of other titles from the corpus, or mislabeled copies of older alchemical texts. While İhsanoğlu’s two-volume bibliographic work is an indispensable reference for scholars of pre-modern Ottoman literature on the natural sciences, the fact that İhsanoğlu had to rely on the catalogues of manuscript libraries, which
and stylistically, but not remarkably so, given the trilingual intellectual world of the Ottoman learned circles and their eclectic literary tastes. In any case, the majority of the surviving texts in question are in Arabic prose, some of which had been wholly or partially translated into Turkish and Persian as early as the first half of the seventeenth century. There are, however, a number of Turkish alchemical poems and one significant Turkish work of prose that had also been attributed to ‘Alī Çelebi. The more important Arabic prose texts, as well as the original Turkish compositions (as opposed to the translations of the former) in verse and prose deserve a preliminary introduction, since their copies not only enable us to observe the emergence of an author-figure largely independent of the Ottoman bio-bibliographical tradition, but also contain some of the key elements with which diverse narratives about the author were forged.

Among the Arabic texts in prose that form the core of the corpus, two are of particular significance due to the role they played in the recognition of an authorial relationship between a number of works that circulated anonymously until the early seventeenth century. These are the *Kashf al-asrār fī hatk al-astār* and the *Durar al-anwār fī asrār al-ahjār* that have been mentioned in the previous two chapters. The importance of the former stems chiefly from the fact that it is a title mentioned by name in a number of later works, including the *Durar al-anwār*, by the author-voice who names it as one of his compositions. In other words, *Kashf al-asrār* constitutes a link that binds the disparate texts that were rarely found together in the earliest manuscript tradition. The importance of the *Durar al-anwār*, on the other hand, is manifold: in addition to being the earliest text to mention the *Kashf al-asrār*, it reveals a relatively substantial number of biographical hints about its author. It is also the work with the

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are more often than not unreliable, diminishes its value considerably. It must also be noted that none of these works has been edited and published to this day, a fact which renders the task of examining the textual relationship between the constituents of the corpus particularly challenging.

228 *Durar al-anwār fī asrār al-ahjār*, Millet MS Ali Emiri (henceforth *Durar al anwār*), fol. 32b.
oldest dated manuscript tradition, from among the AÇ corpus, which, considered together with the internal evidence provided by the text, allows us to place a terminus ante quem for a number of other works. Finally, its concluding chapter provides a list of six additional treatises by the same author, all of which have either been lost or have not survived under their original titles. One of these lost treatises, Lawāī fī āṣrār ḥurūf al-fawātīḥ (“Tablets for the Secrets of the Opening Letters”), apparently contained information about the family of the author, who in his Durar al-anwār directs readers to this particular work for detailed information regarding his lineage. Although the Lawāī has not survived, a commentary on it entitled Hadiyyat al-bahiyyah (“The Beautiful Gift”), which provides a number of quotations from the original text, is found in an eighteenth-century manuscript at the Manisa Public Library in Turkey.

Other Arabic prose works that are important, especially for the purposes of the present chapter, include Sirr ar-rabbānī fī ʿilm al-mīzān (“The Divine Secret for the Science of the Balance”), Durrat al-baydā fī ʿināʿ al-yākūtat al-ḥamrā (“The White Pearl for the Art of the Red Ruby”), Daqāq al-mīzān fī maqādir al-awzān (“The Subtleties of the Balance for the Weights of Measures”), and Ṭawāliʿ al-budūr fī sharh ash-Shudhūr (“The Rising of the Full Moons for the Commentary of the Nuggets [of Gold]”). As the title implies, the Ṭawāliʿ al-budūr is a commentary on Shudhūr adh-dhahāb (“The Nuggets of Gold”), the celebrated alchemical

229 In an important passage that is not, however, consistently present in all the known copies of the Kashf al-asrār, we learn that the author was active during the reign of Sultan Selim II (r. 1566-74). The earliest copy of the Durar al-anwār was finished in 1573. Whether the author was indeed active in the reign of Selim II or not, the six works cited in the conclusion of this text must have therefore been written before 1573; see fn. 13 below for these six works. Furthermore, in Durar al-anwār, the author reveals that he had been practicing the art for thirty years, while in Kasfh al-asrār, in a similarly worded passage, he writes that it had been twenty-three years since he had begun his quest for alchemical knowledge. If accurate, this would place the terminus ante quem of the latter work to the year 1566.

230 Durar al-anwār, fol.32b.

231 Manisa MS 2967, fols. 142a-148a. As the title implies, and as the author himself makes explicit in his Durar al-anwār, Lawāī fī āṣrār ḥurūf al-fawātīḥ was a treatise on the mysterious letter combinations that precede certain Qur’anic sūrahs. The quotations from this work provided in Hadiyyat al-bahiyyah indicate that the Lawāī also treated alchemical subjects, which is not unusual given the important role played by the science of letters (ʿilm al-ḥurūf) in alchemy.
poem in Arabic by the Andalusian alchemist Abu’l Ḥasan ‘Alī ibn Mūsa Ibn Arfa’ Ra’s. This 1460 verses-long magnum opus, which rhymes sequentially with the twenty-eight letters of the Arabic alphabet, has not received much scholarly attention to-date despite its evident prominence among the body of Arabic works available to the students of alchemy in the period under consideration. \(^{233}\) *Shudhūr adh-dhahab* also served as an inspiration and model for the *Divān-i ḥikmet* (“The Anthology of Wisdom”), a Turkish poem that is commonly included in the AÇ corpus and is organized, like the *Shudhūr*, by subsections rhyming sequentially with the letters of the Arabic alphabet. \(^{234}\) Starting in the seventeenth century, the *Divān-i hikmet* is often accompanied in alchemical manuscripts with a number of other alchemical poems in the Turkish vernacular, in effect forming a cycle of poetry whose collective influence on the construction of a particular Sufi identity for the author of the AÇ corpus will be explored in the next chapter.

The second Turkish composition of interest is the aforementioned *Mecmūʿatü'l-mücerrebāt* (“The Collection of the Tested [Operations]”), a manual in prose consisting of eight chapters that pedagogically and epistemologically stands apart from the abovementioned Arabic texts. \(^{235}\) To be more specific, the author of the *Mecmūʿatü'l-mücerrebāt* employs a lucid

\(^{232}\) See Brockelmann, *GAL* II, p. 496.

\(^{233}\) The medieval and early modern fame of this poem, accompanied with a substantial manuscript tradition and several very popular commentaries, meant that Ibn Arfa’ Ra’s did not escape the notice of either historians of science in the caliber of George Sarton or Arabists such as Manfred Ullmann. See Manfred Ullmann, *Die Natur- und Geheimwissenschaften im Islam VI*: 2 (Leiden/Cologne: E.J. Brill, 1972), pp. 231-2. More recently, Gabriele Ferrario delivered a talk entitled “The poetry of alchemy, the alchemy of poetry: preliminary notes on the Shudhur al-Dhahab, Ibn Arfa’ Ra’s’ alchemical poem” at the “On the Fringes of Alchemy” workshop in Budapest in the summer of 2010. As the title of the talk suggests, the poem itself, along with its numerous commentaries, awaits further scholarly attention. I am indebted to Dr. Ferrario for having provided a copy of his presentation at Budapest.

\(^{234}\) The *Divān-i hikmet* is undoubtedly one of the most ubiquitous alchemical works in the manuscript collections of Turkish libraries and its copies are also found in numerous manuscript libraries across Europe and North America. It may be considered the single most important alchemical work composed in the Turkish vernacular judging by its long-term popularity.

\(^{235}\) One of the earliest copies of this work is found in the mid-seventeenth century, Süleymaniye MS Hekimoğlu Ali Paşa 541, fols. 1b-57a. While the manuscript itself is undated, the signature of authorship on fol. 1a bears the name of Mustafa Efendi Sohrabzâde, an accomplished astronomer and the rûznâmçeci (financial secretary) of Ottoman Egypt in the late 1640s. In his *Ta‘rīh*, Na’imâ (d. 1716) narrates that Mustafa Efendi Sohrabzâde had given a copy of the fourteenth century Ilkhanid chronicle *Ta‘rīh-i Vassāf* to Haydarāgâzâde Meḥmed Pasha, the governor of
technical language, devoid of allegories that mark much of the alchemical literature, to provide a long list and description of operations. The absence of a theoretical section further reinforces the handbook-like character of this work. The *Mecmū‘atū‘l-mücerrebāt* is also distinguished by the presence of an autobiographical introduction of considerable length. It is based on this introduction that a recent article on ‘Ali Çelebi by the Turkish scholar İhsan Fazlıoğlu has provided additional details about the little-known life of the Ottoman alchemist.\footnote{İhsan Fazlıoğlu, “Fazıl Ali Bey,” published online on ihsanfazlioglu.net.} Intriguing as the contents of *Mecmū‘atū‘l-mücerrebāt*’s introduction may be, its narration of long and arduous travels in search of knowledge is very likely a topos that is somewhat reminiscent of the introduction of *Nihāyat at-ṭalab*, Jaldakī’s aforementioned magisterial commentary to ‘Irākī’s relatively brief treatise, *Kitāb al-‘ilm al-muktasab fī zira‘at adh-dhahab*.\footnote{The only scholarly work devoted solely to this important text is Manuchehr Taslimi, “An Examination of the ‘Nihāyat al-Ṭalab’ and the Determination of its place and value in the History of Islamic Chemistry” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of London, 1954).}

An investigation of the remainder of *Mecmū‘atū‘l-mücerrebāt* strongly indicates the influence of another work, that of Rāzī’s *Kitāb al-asrār* (“The Book of Secrets”).\footnote{The most recent editions of Rāzī’s *Kitāb al-asrār*, as well as its short addendum, *Kitāb sīr al-asrār* (“The Book of the Secret of Secrets”) is by Muhammad Taqi Danishpazhuh (Tehran: Commission Nationale Iranienne pour l’UNESCO, 1343 [1964]). A German translation of former book was made by J. Ruska, *Al-Razis Buch Geheimnis der Geheimnisse* (Berlin: Verlag Julius Springer, 1937), who erroneously ascribed the title of the shorter work to the longer one.} In fact, with the exception of its introduction and its final chapter, large portions of the *Mecmū‘atū‘l-mücerrebāt* appear to be a Turkish adaptation of this early tenth-century work. Such a striking similarity between the contents of the two works does not, however, in any way rule out mū‘ellif-
i cedīd’s authorship of the Mecmū’atū’l-mücerrebāt. After all, as the collaborative research of H. E. Stapleton and M. Hidayat Husain showed nearly seven decades ago, an entire section of Kitāb al-‘ilm al-muktasab itself had been “plagiarized” from the tenth-century Egyptian alchemist Muḥammad ibn Umayl at-Tamīmī’s Kitāb al-mā’ al-waraqī wa’l-ard an-najmīyya (“The Book of Silvery Water and the Starry Earth”). On the other hand, it is very plausible that a Turkish introduction inspired by the writings of Jaldakī had been grafted to the translated selections from Rāzī’s work, and that this new creation had then been ascribed to ‘Alī Çelebi. This seems all the more likely given the singular importance of Jaldakī for the author of the AÇ corpus. Whatever the authenticity of Mecmū’atū’l-mücerrebāt in its entirety may be, the consideration of its seemingly autobiographical passages as “factual” is problematic.

The Earliest Manuscript Tradition

Just a handful of the works introduced above have manuscript traditions that stretch back to the last quarter of the sixteenth and the opening years of the seventeenth centuries—the rest of the alchemical texts that constitute the AÇ corpus are known entirely through copies dating from the middle of the seventeenth century or much later. By far the oldest manuscript tradition of a work from the corpus is that of the Durar al-anwār, a copy of which is found in the Millet Library in Istanbul (MS Ali Emiri 2842). The copyist of this manuscript, ‘Alī ibn ‘Īvāz ibn Maḥmūd, had completed it, according to a marginal note just below the final line, on the eighth day of the month of Dhu’l-Ḥijja – incidentally the first day of the annual pilgrimage to Mecca—in A.H. 980 (April 11, 1573). There is no indication as to the provenance of the manuscript. A

239 H.E. Stapleton and M.H. Husein, “Three Arabic treatises on alchemy by Muhammad in Umail,” Memoirs of the Asiatic Institute of Bengal 12 (1933), 118.
copy of the Sirr ar-rabbānī at the same library and collection (MS Ali Emiri 2927), is undated, but appears to be near-contemporary with that of the Durar al-anwār.

Besides their age, the most noteworthy feature of these two manuscripts is that the respective copies of the Durar al-anwār and the Sirr ar-rabbānī are the sole works which they contain and that, moreover, neither of these is an autograph. As far as the triangular connection between the author, the text and the physical object in the shape of a manuscript is concerned, the written culture of the pre-modern Islamic world shows certain similarities with that of the medieval West. While canonical texts, such as al-Bayḍāwī’s Qur’anic exegesis Asrār at-tanzīl wa anwār at-ta‘wīl, Ibn Sinā’s medical compendium Kānūn fī ’t-ṭībb, or Jaldakī’s Nihāyat at-ṭalab, were almost always accorded the dignity of solitary existence within the pages of a manuscript, in part due to their length, the overwhelming majority of works across all genres shared the same physical space in a codex with the writings, often in diverse subjects, of other authors. The copies of the Durar al-anwār and the Sirr ar-rabbānī in the Millet Library are therefore exceptional displays of textual and material unity between the work itself and the manuscript which it occupies. More to the point, the brevity of both works, each covering thirty-

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240 This is not to suggest that autographs by default found a solitary existence within a manuscript. Far from it, many autograph alchemical treatises are found as just one among many other texts in a manuscript. The late-seventeenth century Celveti sheikh ‘Oşmān Atpazārī’s alchemical treatise Hidāyat al-mutahayyir in Süleymaniye MS Esad Efendi 3491, fols. 92-122, to cite one example, is an autograph copy that is preceded and followed by a number of other works.

241 In his critique of Michel Foucault’s seminal lecture “Qu’est-ce qu’un auteur?” Roger Chartier remarks that the fourteenth century witnessed the development of a new relationship between the author, his work, and “the book as an object” in Western Europe. Whereas miscellaneous books, whose contents were determined by the interests of the individual reader-copyist, had previously been the norm, over the course of the fourteenth century manuscripts containing the works of a single author, or even an individual work by an author, were increasingly produced. Chartier does acknowledge that canonical works had often been found as solitary works in a manuscript long before the fourteenth century, and that miscellaneous manuscripts never altogether disappeared from the written culture of Western Europe. The main point here, however, is that “the connection between a material unit and a textual one ascribed to an author” can be traced back to the fourteenth century, predating the invention of movable type printing and the advent of the copyright. Roger Chartier, “Foucault’s Chiasmus: Authorship between Science and Literature in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries” in Scientific Authorship: Credit and Intellectual Property in Science, eds. Mario Biagioli and Peter Galison (New York: Routlege, 2003), p. 26.
two folios, contrasts sharply with the length of many texts accepted as canonical, including the three examples just cited, all of which occupy hundreds of folios—that the respective producers of these two manuscripts made a conscious decision to copy such short texts independently attests to the importance accorded to them already in the late sixteenth century. Although both the Durar al-anwār and the Sirr ar-rabbānī are later found copied together with texts from diverse genres, their copies in the Millet Library foreshadow the author’s eventual elevation to a status far surpassing that of any early modern Muslim alchemist—a mere foreshadowing, precisely because neither the original copyists nor the persons responsible for the near-contemporary marginalia had made any attempt to actually identify the author. To put it simply, a strong connection between the text and the physical object had been made, but the author, despite having an assertive voice within his writings, is conspicuously absent in the imagination of his audience at this time. As we shall shortly observe in this and the following chapter, it was the seventeenth-century readership that would actively seek an author-figure for the AÇ corpus.\footnote{242}

If another copy of Durar al-anwār had been made during the three decades after MS Ali Emiri 2842’s creation, none seems to have survived. The next oldest extant copy of this work, dating from 1607, is in the Österreichische Nationalbibliothek (Vienna MS A.F. 327), the first of seven alchemical treatises in a manuscript that had been produced in Istanbul by Ebū’l-Ṣīṣ Ādem ibn Қāṣim ibn Ḥūẓir ibn ʿAbdüllaṭf el-Iznīkī.\footnote{243} Similar to the Millet Kütüphanesi copy which

\footnote{242} The case of Süleymaniye MS Hacı Selim Ağa 881, a manuscript collection of nine works ascribed to the mü‘ellif-i cedīd ʿAlī Çelebī that had been produced in Istanbul in 1682, is of particular interest with respect to Chartier’s analysis of fourteenth-century developments in Western Europe. For the first time in Ottoman alchemical literature, a strong link between the physical book, the author, and his writings had been established, albeit one, it needs to be admitted, that was not repeated for other author-figures. This fact marks MS Hacı Selim Ağa 881 and Millet MSS Ali Emiri 2842 and 2927 alike as exceptions rather than the beginnings of a pattern, a situation that arose from the raising of ʿAlī Çelebī to the status of a canonical author.

\footnote{243} Vienna MS A.F. 327, fol. 37b.
preceded it, this copy of Durar al-anwār is also anonymous and no attempt had been made to identify the author at a later date. As for Sirr ar-rabbānī, its oldest dated surviving copy is found, along with that of another work from the corpus, the Durrat al-bayḍā, in the Istanbul University MS AY 6247; again, both are anonymous and had been produced by a certain Sinān ibn ʿAbdullāh in either 1581 or 1591. A nineteenth-century library slip within the manuscript declares the author of Sirr ar-rabbānī to be Jaldakī, whose name had been crossed out at a later date only to be replaced with the reassuring words “[mūʾellifi] gayr-t maʾlūmdur” ([its author] is unknown).

That the earliest copies for Durar al-anwār, Sirr ar-rabbānī, and Durrat al-bayḍā (as well as that for Divān-ı ḥikmet), which together represent the oldest extant constituents of the AÇ corpus, are without an exception all anonymous is not remarkable. The circulation of a new work first among the friends and acquaintances of its author could render the mentioning of his name redundant, and, moreover, some of the later copies based on them could also be anonymous, either for the same reason, or because the name of the author was no longer known. Rather, noteworthy here are the subsequent developments in the relevant manuscript traditions, in which one can trace the construction of at-times conflicting author-figures for the AÇ corpus by multiple generations of readers. The first step in the posthumous emergence of the author out of anonymity was the general acceptance of an epithet without a name.

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244 The month and the exact day in which the copy of Sirr ar-rabbānī had been completed can be read with ease: the 24th of Rabī’ al-ākhir. The year, however, presents an interesting problem. For both Sirr ar-rabbānī and Durrat al-bayḍā the year in which they were copied reads: tis’a wa tis’ in wa tis’ami’a’ (A.H. 999), to which the Arabic numerals 989 have been added, perhaps at a later date. While one would like to give preference to the former year, it is safer to make a mention of both dates.
Towards “a new author”

Within three decades of Sinān ibn ‘Abdullāh’s reproduction of Sīrr ar-rabbānī and Durrat al-bayḍā in Istanbul University MS AY 6247, a new alchemical compendium was created that is very likely to be based on this or a closely-related manuscript. Mirroring much of MS AY 6247’s content, Sūleymaniye MS Carullah 2065 also includes a copy of Durrat al-bayḍā that immediately follows Sīrr ar-rabbānī—both were completed in A.H. 1018 (1609-10). The latter work, however, is preceded by a title page in this instance, offering the readers the name of the treatise and, for the first time in the manuscript tradition, a designation for its author: al-muṣannif al-jadīd (“the new, or modern, writer”). Both the style of the handwriting and the condition of the ink that grace the upper half of this title page indicate that the identification does not significantly postdate the copy itself, and the two might indeed be contemporaneous. Despite the unprecedented nature of this title-page, the epithet al-muṣannif al-jadīd would turn out to be a short-lived one; by the early decades of the seventeenth century, the near-synonymous epithet al-mu’allif al-jadīd came to dominate the manuscript tradition.

Since the interchangeable use of these two words, muṣannif and mu’allif, are frequently observed in the multilingual literatures of the Islamic world, it is not unreasonable to view the preference of mu’allif over muṣannif by the corpus’s seventeenth-century copyists as merely cosmetic. Yet such an evaluation neither explains the overwhelming popularity of the former designation nor the total disappearance of the latter. Even though the general connotation of both words is “writer,” this connotation itself includes a wider range of potential meanings. Two of these meanings are relevant to our discussion: muṣannif, derived from a trilateral Arabic root

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245 Sūleymaniye MS Carullah 2065, fol. 37a.
246 A much later hand, as evidenced by the use of a pencil and the rīk ‘a script, added a clarification to the middle of this title page, identifying the author as ar-rūmī al-jadīd ‘Alī Beyk (“the modern Anatolian ‘Alī Beg”).
that denotes the act of separating or distinguishing, can refer to a “compiler” of texts, while the “composer” of an original piece of work is often expressed with the word mu'allif.\textsuperscript{247} Based on the content of Sirr ar-rabbānī alone, with its myriad quotations from older alchemical texts, the classification of its author as a muşannif (in the sense of a compiler) does appear to be rather fitting, an impression undoubtedly shared by the unknown writer of MS Carullah 2065’s relevant title page. This part of the manuscript was produced in 1609 or 1610, at a time when the textual relationship between the disparate works that would later be recognized as the AÇ corpus was just beginning to be understood. Once the full extent of the works that were written by, or with some stretch of the imagination could be attributed to, “the new author” was realized, the epithet al-mu’allif al-jadīd, with its connotations of original authorship, must have appeared much more appropriate.

It is possible that these two senses for the words muşannif and mu’allif became particularly meaningful at a time when the Ottoman learned circles in Istanbul (as well as those in nearby major cities such as Bursa, Edirne, Manisa, and Thessaloniki etc.) were beginning to show signs of a level of intellectual self-confidence that would have almost been unimaginable to their precursors. One of the major political powers of Western Asia and the Balkans since the early fifteenth century, the Ottoman Empire had come to control the traditional heartlands of the Islamic world with the annexation of the Mamluk Sultanate in 1517 and had successfully fashioned itself as the champion of Sunni Islam against the Shi‘i Safavids. The shift in the cultural and intellectual realms, however, was arguably even more striking, as Istanbul, which

\textsuperscript{247} Both terms have approximate counterparts in the medieval Western European literary tradition, the compilator and the auctor respectively. The categorization of different modes of authorship in the late medieval and early modern Islamic culture of writing has unfortunately not attracted much scholarly interest. For one such study, see T. Sultanov, “Authors and Authorship in Persian and Turkic Historical Writings,” Manusciripta Orientalia V (1999), pp. 23-27. For a discussion of the subject in its European context, see A.J. Minnis, Medieval Theory of Authorship: Scholastic Literary Attitudes in the Later Middle Ages (London: Scolar Press, 1984), especially pp. 94-103.
had once been peripheral for the arts and sciences within the Islamic world transformed, over the
course of the sixteenth century, into arguably its new center with prestigious new medreses, rich
libraries, and lively book markets. Needless to say, the almost limitless possibilities of patronage
in the imperial capital, not only in the person of the Sultan but also from the members of his
household and the prominent figures of the administration, had been a decisive factor in this
transformation.\textsuperscript{248} The men-of-letters of the new center would contribute to almost all branches
of \textit{naqlī} (transmitted) and \textit{‘aqlī} (rational) sciences in Arabic, Persian, and, increasingly, the
Turkish vernacular. Muṣṭafā ‘Ālī’s (d. ca. 1600) world history \textit{Kunh al-akhbār}, Ṣınālāzāde
‘Ālā’eddīn’s (d. 1572) ethics manual \textit{Aḥlāq-i ‘Alā ī}, and ‘Āşık Çelebi’s (d. 1572) biography of
poets \textit{Meşā ‘irū ‘s-su’arā} are only a few of the works that attest to the creative energies of this
period.\textsuperscript{249} The true significance of the \textit{AÇ} corpus, and that of the question of its authorship, can
only be appreciated in light of these developments. Having emerged at a time of intense
intellectual activity at the Empire’s center, the corpus was soon recognized as the primary
Ottoman contribution to the vast body of Islamic alchemical literature. The epithet \textit{al-mu’allif al-

\textsuperscript{248} The diverse networks of patronage in the imperial capital, and their impact on the production of illuminated
manuscripts in particular, has been explored in a recent study by Emine F. Fetvaci, “Viziers to Eunuchs: Transitions
in Ottoman Manuscript Patronage, 1566–1617” (PhD Dissertation, Harvard University, 2005).

\textsuperscript{249} The traditional narrative of Islamic scientific and intellectual history that characterizes the early modern
production of knowledge in the Muslim world as somehow inferior to, and derivative of, older works is finally being
challenged with increasing vigor and frequency. A typical example of this traditional narrative is found in Bernard
Lewis, \textit{The Muslim Discovery of Europe} (New York: W.W. Norton, 1982 and 2003), p. 230: “One is tempted to
seek a parallel in the development of Muslim science, where the exercise of independent judgment in early days
produced a rich flowering of scientific activity and discovery but where, too, the gate of \textit{ijtihād} was subsequently
closed and a long period followed during which Muslim science consisted almost entirely of compilation and
repetition.” One possible critique of this view is to demonstrate the ways in which Muslim science in the post-
classical period contributed to, or interacted with, that of the West—this is the direction of research taken by George
Saliba, and more recently of Avner Ben-Zaken, on late medieval and early modern astronomy, who have established
not only the contributions of the Muslim world to the so-called Copernican Revolution, but also the reception of
Copernican ideas by the Ottomans. On the latter subject, see Avner Ben-Zaken’s aforementioned \textit{Cross Cultural
Scientific Exchanges in the Eastern Mediterranean}. Rather than directly challenging the narrative of scientific
decline, these works (whose importance in the historiography of Islamic science one must acknowledge) implicitly
postpone the beginning of decline to a later point.
jadīd was appropriate, but ultimately inadequate. Posterity required from them more: a name, and a life story, that would decisively proclaim the author’s Rumi identity.

Enter Kātib Çelebi

Around the time in which the Ottoman learned circles were claiming a prominent position for themselves within the long history of Islamic learning, one celebrated Istanbulite was tirelessly working on his bibliographic masterpiece that would match the fame of the tenth-century Baghdadi scholar Ibn an-Nadīm’s al-Fihrīst (“The Catalogue”). Kātib Çelebi, also known as Ḥacī Ḥalīfe, needs little introduction: born in 1609 to a mother who inherited a mercantile fortune and a father who held important military and fiscal positions in the imperial administration, Kātib Çelebi himself served in the Ottoman army as a scribe on a number of eastern campaigns.250 Having studied under several luminaries of his day, including the learned and controversial Ḥaḍīzāde Meḥmed Efendi (d. 1635), Kātib Çelebi had famously spent much of his inheritance on acquiring manuscript copies of rare books.251 The scope of his encyclopedic oeuvre reflects the mind of a polymath who made a series of ambitious attempts to bring together all fields of accumulated secular human knowledge: history (Fadhlakat aqwāl al-akhyār), chronology (Taḵwīm at-tawāriḥ), geography (Cihānnumā), biography (Ṣullam al-wuṣūl ilā ʿtabakāt al-fuḥūl), and the categorization of sciences and bibliography (Kashf az-ẓunūn ‘an asāmī’l-kutub waʾl-funūn).252

251 Ibid., p. 128.
252 For these and other works by Kātib Çelebi, see ibid., 130-35 and Encyclopedia of Islam, 2nd ed., s.v. ‘Kātib Çelebi’
It was with the writing of the *Kashf az-zunūn ‘an asāmī‘l-kutub wa‘l-funūn* (“The Lifting of Doubts from the Names of Books and of Sciences”) that the cryptic epithet *al-mu’allif al-jadīd* for the first time received a proper name. In the entry for *Kashf al-asrār fī hatk al-astār*, Kātib Çelebi pithily writes that this is a work on *al-kimyā* and that the author of the text is *al-mu’allif al-jadīd*, who is, he adds, “‘Alī Beg ibn Ḫūsrev al-Iznīkī.”253 The same information is repeated in the entry for *Sirr ar-rabbānī*, whose author is given as *al-mu’allif ar-rūmī al-jadīd* (the new Anatolian author), that is, “‘Alī Beg.”254 Since Kātib Çelebi does not provide specific information on his sources for each of the thousands of works that fill the pages of *Kashf az-zunūn*, it is very difficult to say upon what he was basing the association of *al-mu’allif al-jadīd* with ‘Alī Beg ibn Ḫūsrev al-Iznīkī. Considering the way in which he phrased the identification, however, it is possible to suggest two likely scenarios.

Significantly, Kātib Çelebi first and foremost provides the epithet *al-mu’allif al-jadīd* for the author of both *Kashf al-asrār* and *Sirr ar-rabbānī*. This epithet must have begun appearing in the manuscript traditions of these two works around the turn of the seventeenth century (and replacing the short-lived epithet *al-muṣannif al-jadīd* in the process) for, as already observed above, the earliest surviving manuscript traditions are in fact anonymous. Kātib Çelebi himself writes that he did not begin collecting notes for the *Kashf az-zunūn* until 1633, when the Ottoman army wintered in Aleppo during its eastward march against Safavid positions in Revan (Yerevan) and Tabriz.255 Whether Kātib Çelebi saw a copy of either work in the booksellers of Aleppo during this stage of his research, or at a later time in Istanbul or elsewhere is impossible

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253 *Kashf az-zunūn ‘an asāmī‘l-kutub wa‘l-funūn* v.1 (İstanbul, 1320 [1902/3]), p. 317.
254 Ibid., p. 24. A third work from the corpus, *Jawāhir al-asrār fī mā‘ruf al-ahjār*, has also been ascribed to ‘Alī Beg in the Turkish translation of the *Kashf az-zunūn* published by the Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları in 2006. The manuscript copies of the *Kashf az-zunūn*, as well as its Arabic editions published in Cairo and Istanbul, however, list this work without mentioning the name of its author.
to know. What seems rather obvious, however, is that both of these works were already famous as having been authored by the elusive al-mu‘allif al-jadīd and that the copies Kātib Çelebi had seen almost certainly included references to this epithet.

For Kātib Çelebi to have linked al-mu‘allif al-jadīd to a specific name, one of two things must have been true: he either saw a copy of either work that associated the epithet with ‘Alī Beg ibn Ḫūsrev al-Ifnīkī, or had orally received information about this individual that allowed him to make just such a connection. It is important to note that the name ‘Alī Beg ibn Ḫūsrev only begins to creep into the manuscript tradition after the publication of Kashf az-żunūn, and one suspects that the reputation of Kātib Çelebi’s writings was the decisive factor in the popularization of this name. This fact, considered together with the long-term connections Kātib Çelebi had with those who copied and traded manuscripts in Istanbul, makes the latter scenario, which is that he had received oral information about the identity of al-mu‘allif al-jadīd, much more probable. Once the life of ‘Alī Beg ibn Ḫūsrev is taken into account, the likelihood of such a scenario will become even more apparent.

*Nevīzāde ‘Aṭā‘ī meets ‘Alī Beg ibn Ḫūsrev*

Nearly all that we know about the ‘Alī Beg ibn Ḫūsrev mentioned by Kātib Çelebi comes from yet another seminal seventeenth-century reference work, the Hadā‘i’ku’l-ḥakā‘i’k fī tekmiletü ’s-Ṣakā‘i’k (“The Gardens of Truths for the Perfection of the Ṣaḵā’i’k”). Its author, also an Istanbulite, was Nevīzāde ‘Aṭā‘ī (d. 1635), who had already published this voluminous supplement to Ṭāsköprizāde’s sixteenth-century biographical dictionary before Kātib Çelebi had

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256 Edited and published for the first time in Istanbul in 1268 [1851].
started collecting his first bibliographic notes for the _Kashf az-żunūn_. In the Ḥadāʾikuʾl-ḥakāʾik, we find ‘Alī Beg under the heading of sheikhs who had passed away during the reign of Sultan Aḥmed I (r. 1603-17). Although the information ‘Atāʾī provides is not particularly detailed, what little he does mention is of extraordinary importance, owing both to the fact that this passage is our sole source for the life of ‘Alī Beg and that the entry was apparently based on first-hand knowledge: ‘Atāʾī met ‘Alī Beg, when the latter, advanced in years, had settled in Sütlüce across the Golden Horn from Istanbul. During their meeting, Nevʿizāde ‘Atāʾī had the opportunity to talk to ‘Alī Beg at some length, and presented him a copy of _Muḥaṣṣil al-kalām_, one of the many books authored by his learned father Nevʿī.

According to ‘Atāʾī, ‘Alī Beg’s father Ḥūsrev had been a military land holder (mutaṣarrf-ı zeʾāmet) of some importance whose family pedigree reached back to one of the most celebrated figures of the early Ottoman emirate, Sheikh Edebālī, the father-in-law of ‘Osmān I (d. ca. 1324). We are further told that ‘Alī Beg had participated in the Ottoman military campaigns against Belgrade (1521) and Baghdad (1533-36). Since ‘Alī Beg was certainly active around the turn of the seventeenth century, it is very likely that he had simply accompanied his father during these two of the most important campaigns of Sultan Süleymān’s (r. 1520-66) early reign. Concerning the decades-long stretch of time between ‘Alī Beg’s childhood and his very late move to Istanbul during the reign of Meḥmed III (r. 1595-1603), ‘Atāʾī merely mentions that he had travelled for his education in the religious sciences and in mystical wisdom (taḥṣīl-ı ’ulūm-u dīnīyye ve mʾāruf-u yakīniyye) before settling in his place of birth, Iznik in northwestern Anatolia. Presumably, it was from Iznik that he had moved to

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257 On ‘Atāʾī, see _Encyclopedia of Islam_, 2nd ed., s.v. Although born and raised in Istanbul, ‘Atāʾī’s family hailed from Malkara in Thrace, as indicated by his father’s Nevʿī’s epithet, Malkaravī.


259 Ibid., p. 597.
Istanbul at the closing years of the sixteenth century. Once relocated, his erudition was quickly recognized by the powerful of the state—he was both visited by viziers and religious scholars in his house at Sütlüce and summoned to the Topkapı Palace for consultation on many occasions. Rather strangely for a man who had spent the majority of his years away from the political spotlight of the Ottoman capital, ‘Alī Beg ended his life at the very center of it all by girding “the sword of ‘Osmān” on Sultan Aḥmed I during the latter’s accession ceremony in 1603. He passed away in 1609 or 1610, and was buried at the prestigious mosque cemetery of Eyüb Sultan, the very place where Aḥmed I had received the symbol of imperial authority from the hands of ‘Alī Beg six year years earlier.

With respect to ‘Alī Beg’s works, the entry in the Ḥadāʾik al-ḥakāʾık is even less forthcoming, enumerating only three items: a commentary (ṣerḥ) on the Qaṣīdat as-suʾlūkiyyah, a treatise on predestination (ḵaza ḵader risālesī), and finally some treatises concerning the inquiry of difficult problems (mesāʾil-i gāmiže tahkīkinde resāʾil). The first of these items on surface appears to be a commentary on one particular poem by the celebrated ṣaʿālik or brigand-poets of the pre and early Islamic periods. Without additional information, however, it is difficult to ascertain which of these poems was the subject of the commentary, or whether if the poem was indeed ascribed to a ṣuʾlūk and not a treatise in verse on poverty or dervish-hood.‘Alī Beg’s mystical training and known association with at least one important Sufi of his age renders the last interpretation somewhat more likely. The second work on predestination is more in line with the life-story provided by ‘Atāʾī, as this was precisely the type of subject about which

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260 Ibid., p. 598.
261 Süleymanıye MS Yahya Tevfik 1733, fols. 115-24.
262 Namely, the abovementioned Sheikh ‘Azīz Maḥmūd Ḫūşayī.
the religious scholars of the capital sought ‘Alī Beg’s expertise. As for the last item, that is treatises on the inquiry of difficult problems, it could signify a wide-range of subjects including, but not limited to, law and grammar. Earlier in his entry for ‘Alī Beg, ‘Aṭā’ī does state that the former frequently clarified problems relating to dialectic theology and philosophy (gâmiže-i kelâmiye ve ḥikemiye) in social gatherings (mecâlis), which suggests that this group of treatises themselves were dedicated to such problems, and may have even been composed as a result of these discussions.

It is somewhat puzzling that ‘Aṭā’ī neither mentions alchemy explicitly among the interests of ‘Alī Beg nor cites any of the dozens of treatises that were to be eventually associated with his name. As observed above, many of these works had already been written and were in circulation long before the two men met in Istanbul. This is not to suggest that the entry is devoid of very subtle references to the esoteric sciences. Indeed, the aforementioned texts on the “inquiry of difficult problems” could include alchemy, in reference to the clarification of symbols and allegories used in most alchemical texts. More specifically, philosophical problems (gâmiže-i...hikemiye) can certainly involve those about alchemy, a branch of knowledge that is often closely associated with, and at times even directly referred to as, ‘ilm-i ḥikmet (literally, “the science of wisdom”) by its practitioners. There are further possible, but much more ambiguous, allusions to alchemy in the same passage: ‘Alī Beg is described as a mystic whose spiritual station resembles the essence of Plato (...ḥam rū-yi ḳoyūn-u pīr Eflâtûn-nihâd), and as someone who is the possessor of “the divine science” (‘ilmu ’r-rabbânî), “the buried treasures of the Qur’an’s secrets” (gend-i defîn-i esrâr-i Kur’ân), and “the hidden pearl of divine authority”

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263 ‘Aṭā’ī, Ḥadâ’iku l-ḥaḳâʾîk, p. 598.
Although this imagery, with variations, is frequently encountered in the Islamic esoteric literature, it must be acknowledged that it is also commonly found in non-esoteric texts. In other words, ‘Aṭā’ī’s ornate praise of ‘Alī Beg’s learning is hopelessly nonspecific to be used as an indicator of the latter’s interest in alchemy.

The lack of any explicit references to ‘Alī Beg’s practice of alchemy is all the more perplexing as ‘Aṭā’ī himself did not have any reservations about citing the alchemical interests of respected scholars, as seen in his entry for Mollā Muḥammed al-‘Uṭūfī, a “seeker of alchemy” (ṭālib-i kimyā) who, despite a brief bout of insanity, is spoken of in glowing terms in the Ḥadā‘iḵu’l-ḥakā‘iḵ. A possible explanation is that ‘Alī Beg himself was perhaps uncomfortable with his earlier interest in the alchemical arts—it is not inconceivable that he had written the majority of his works around the middle of the sixteenth century, and then turned his scholarly attention on any number of the sciences cited by ‘Aṭā’ī. The latter, in turn, might have simply alluded to, rather than overtly state, ‘Alī Beg’s knowledge of alchemy at his personal behest. While this is admittedly a conjecture, it would not be the first instance of an individual who, having devoted himself to alchemy for decades, at a later point abandoned his pursuit of the art.

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264 Ibid., p. 598.
266 The physician and  muqaddim  ‘Abdullaṭīf al-Baghdādī (d. 1230) is one famous example of such a reversal of belief and interest. Having spent his years on seeking knowledge on the art of alchemy, he forcefully denounced it later in his life. The autobiographical notes of ‘Abdullaṭīf al-Baghdādī were preserved in Ibn abī Uṣaybi’a’s (d. 1270) ‘Uyūn al-anbā‘ī fī ḥabākah al-ṭibbā‘. Translated and annotated in Dwight F. Reynolds, ed. Interpreting the Self: Autobiography in the Arabic Literary Tradition (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), pp. 157-164. In the Ottoman hagiographic literature, we also occasionally find mystics who renounced their “worldly” interest in alchemy as seen in the case of Meḥmed Çelebī, the son of the Zeynī Sheikh Pīr Meḥmed. His son’s preoccupation with the art only came to an end after Pīr Meḥmed performed a miracle to demonstrate the superficiality of alchemy. For this miracle, see Şerīf Meḥmed. Menākıb-ı Şeyh Burhāneddīn, Süleymaniye MS Hacı Mahmud Efendi 4552, fol. 11b. On the Şerīfīzāde family, see Sadık Yazar, “Şeyyid Şerif Mehmed Efendi ve Hilyesi,” Türkoloji Araştırmaları vol. 2:4 (December, 2007), pp. 1026-44.
Regardless of the real reasons behind ‘Aṭā’ī’s silence on the matter, there is no denying that Kātib Çelebi was unequivocal in his identification of al-mu’allif al-jadīd as ‘Alī Beg ibn Ḥüsrev. A meticulous researcher, and arguably the most knowledgeable person concerning the bibloculture of his age and society, Kātib Çelebi is a scholar whose opinion the modern historian should not second-guess lightly. The manuscript traditions of ‘Alī Çelebi’s works attest to the respectability of Kātib Çelebi—earliest copies of these texts unmistakably ascribed to ‘Alī Beg ibn Ḥüsrev all follow on the heels of Kashf aẓ-ẓunūn’s “publication.” In many instances, this name had been added at a much later date, presumably as a result of the copyist’s, or more likely the librarian’s, consultation of the related entries in Kashf aẓ-ẓunūn.267 ‘Alī Beg is not completely unknown from the manuscript copies of works on other subjects either: the aforesaid treatise on predestination (risāle-i każa ve kader) has apparently survived in at least one copy, and an Arabic treatise on mysticism (risāla fi’t-taṣawwuf) with the title-heading bearing the name Fāḍil ‘Alī Beg, a variation of the author’s name provided in the Ḥadāʾiku’l-ḥaḳaʾık, is also known.268 Finally, the telling correspondence between ‘Azīz Maḥmūd Ḥūdāyī, the founder of the Celvetī order mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, and ‘Alī Beg, the first lines of which are quoted by ‘Aṭā’ī, can be read in full in Süleymaniye MS Hacı Beşir Ağa 653. Although the contents of these two letters reveal no further details about ‘Alī Beg himself, they do establish the links of

267 Some examples include a copy of Risala fi’l-ʿilm al-musamma bi’l-wahī in Leiden MS Or. 12.048 (a manuscript I have not seen, but judging from the title, this treatise must be an excerpt from the Sirr ar-rabbānī), wherein the original title page which gave the author’s name as al-mu’allif al-jadīd ar-rūmī had apparently been clarified by a later hand as ‘Alī Beg. Similarly in the Süleymaniye MSS İzmir 424 and Carullah 2065, we find the name ‘Alī Beg al-Iznīḳī and ‘Alī Beg ar-Rūmī added respectively to the title pages in much later hands.
mutual friendship between the two men and constitute a convincing argument for ‘Alī Beg’s Celvetī leanings.269

This is then the full extent of what can be gleaned from the seventeenth-century Ottoman bio-bibliographic literature about ‘Alī Beg ibn Ḫūsrev. It is also, not coincidentally, the narrative provided by contemporary scholarship concerning the life of the author of the AÇ corpus. Relying almost exclusively on Kātīb Çelebi and ‘Aṭā’ī, often through the intermediary of nineteenth and early twentieth-century Ottoman biographical dictionaries such as the Sicill-i ‘Osmānī and ‘Osmānlī Mü’ellifleri, the modern historians of “Ottoman scientists” have by and large overlooked the manuscript traditions of works attributed to the mü’ellif-i cedīd and those of related alchemical texts that offer conflicting biographical narratives. One such narrative that came to dominate much of the manuscript tradition starting in the middle of the seventeenth-century identifies the author as Eşrefzāde ‘Alī, the development and implications of which is the subject of the following chapter. Before addressing that issue, our focus will shift to two distinct, but interrelated, issues emerging from the self-referential and autobiographical passages in the AÇ corpus: the manner in which mü’ellif-i cedīd constructed his authorial authority and wrote about his alchemical training.

The author on himself

Considering the length of his extensive writings, the instances in which the mü’ellif-i cedīd offers a glimpse of himself and of his own life are relatively rare. One common feature of

269 See Süleymaniye MS Hacı Beşir Ağa 653, 172b. A second indicator of the mystical path trodden by ‘Alī Beg is provided by Müstakimzāde’s eighteenth-century biographical dictionary Devhatū’l-meşāyih, in which ‘Alī b. Ḫūsrev el-İznikī is mentioned as one of the disciples of the famous Melamī sheikh İdrīs-i Muḥtefī.
these limited self-referential passages is their calculated use—in no such instance does the reader get the sense that the author-voice breaks the technical narrative lightly and unintentionally. In each case, the müʾellif-i cedīd not only carefully constructs his authority, but does so in a manner that sets the tone of his writings apart from those prevalent in other contemporary alchemical texts.

It is well worth to reiterating a point already made in the introduction of this chapter: even considering his intellectual milieu, wherein humility was not among the fortes of the contributors to the written culture, the müʾellif-i cedīd often sounds astonishingly proud of his learning, his accomplishments, and, most importantly, his own place in history. Most commonly, the author praises the merits of the text at hand vis-à-vis the hitherto available literature. The claim of clarifying alchemical principles and their applications that had earlier been written about only allegorically in order to confuse the uninitiated is, of course, as old as the textual history of alchemy itself. While such passages are common both to the AÇ corpus and other contemporary works on alchemy, the müʾellif-i cedīd takes a bold step above and beyond this trope. Weighing on the significance of astrological conjunctions (qirānāt) for the successful execution of alchemical procedures in Kashf al-asrār, the author claims that he is the first to write about the specifics of astrological conjunctions from among all the Greek and Muslim sages, and that through his life-long quest for knowledge, the müʾellif-i cedīd had become the “inheritor of the prophets and the sages of Islam.”270 The passage is intended to highlight one of the original contributions of the author to alchemical literature, and, at the same time, alludes to two sources of his authority: his own intellect and divine revelation.271

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270 Kashf al-asrār, Istanbul University, MS T 6092, fol. 54a.
271 Perhaps not coincidentally, these two sources of the author’s authority corresponds to two branches of ʿilm in one of the most common categorizations of knowledge in Islamic thought: nakhlī (transmitted) and ʿakhlī (rational).
Indeed, as important as diligent study and experience were for the acquisition of alchemical knowledge, it was commonly accepted that the disclosure of the secrets of creation to the aspiring student rested ultimately with God, who had already revealed them to his prophets and saints (awliyā). This prevailing viewpoint is best attested in the popular saying attributed to ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib in the apocryphal Khutbat al-bayān, alchemy is “the sister of prophecy” (ukht an-nubuwwa). Without a doubt, this saying, quoted on a number of occasions by the mū‘ellif-i cedīd, was in his mind when he boldly wrote that the divine knowledge known as “revelation” is identical with “the science of the balance” (inna ‘l-‘ilm al-ilāhī al-masammi bi ‘l-wahi huwa al-‘ilm al-masammi bi ‘ilm al-mīzān).\(^{272}\) The same viewpoint also provided a basis for the practice of reciting Qur’anic passages prior to reading alchemical texts (or experimenting), an act that was not merely prophylactic or talismanic: to the worthy and the pure-hearted, it would open the gates of revelation. As we have already observed in the preceding chapter, ‘Alī Çelebi urged his readers to recite in particular the sixth sūra of the Qur’an, the Sūrat al-‘An‘ām, so as to facilitate their understanding of divine secrets. It was while reciting the verses of this sūra that the author himself had finally been allowed by God to attain the knowledge he sought.\(^{273}\)

It was implicitly understood that for the majority of seekers, “success” meant the revelation of some of the secrets of creation, and that the totality of this knowledge could be received and understood by only a chosen few. Among these elect were those considered to be the greatest alchemist-authors of the Greek and Muslim traditions, including Plato, Aristotle, Zosimos of Panopolis, and Jābir ibn Hayyān, each having preserved, expounded upon, and transmitted the wisdom of the previous generations. At the time of the composition of the 272 Daqāiq al-mīzān fī maqādir al-awzān, Süleymaniye MS Carullah 1537, fol. 1b. On the spiritual dimensions of the “science of the balance,” and its integral part in Islamic alchemy, see Henry Corbin, History of Islamic Philosophy (London: Kegan Paul International, 1993), pp. 130-31. 273 Durar al-anwār, Millet MS Ali Emiri 2842, fol. 32b.
corpus, the last such mujaddid (“renewer”, to appropriate the Sunni revivalist terminology) of alchemical knowledge, and one universally recognized as such, had been Jaldakī in the early fourteenth century, whose writings that synthesized innumerable older texts were of primary importance for the students of the art in the early modern Ottoman world. This perceived position of Jaldakī at the tail-end of a long chain of eminent sages would be used by the mü‘ellif-i cedīd to claim a unique place for himself in the transmission of divine knowledge.

*Mü‘ellif-i cedīd and Jaldakī*

The internal evidence from the AÇ corpus provides compelling signs of the author’s attempts to construct a special relationship between himself and Jaldakī. The most obvious, but also the weakest, evidence comes from the quotations from older alchemical writings found in the corpus. Not surprisingly, quotations from Jaldakī’s works, along with the Jābirian corpus, visibly dominate our Arabic prose texts. Two works by Jaldakī in particular, *Nihāyat aṭ-ṭalab* and *Burhān fī asrār ‘ilm al-mīzān* appear to have provided not only the majority of these quotations, but also much of those from the writings of older Greek and Muslim alchemists, which Jaldakī faithfully preserved in his works. That Jaldakī is the primary source for authoritative quotations and excerpts in the AÇ corpus is to be expected, as his books were widely available in the sixteenth century, unlike many of the older texts which he had used for composing them. Jaldakī’s reputation as the greatest alchemist-author of his age, one whose renown had not been surpassed by any other since his death around the middle of the fourteenth century, also imbued these quotations with an aura of undeniable authority. The

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modern scholarship on early modern Islamic science has been generally harsh in its judgment of the scientific literature of this period—the predominance of commentaries and supercommentaries, as well as of a seemingly unquestioning deference to older authorities in independent compositions were read as symptoms of an intellectual decline that was mirrored by a supposed decline in the political and economic arena.\textsuperscript{275} And yet for the Ottoman readers of the \textit{mü’ellif-i cedīd}’s writings, such frequent quotations from Jaldakī did not indicate a lack of “originality” (whether or not this word has any meaning, or relevance, in the context of Islamic alchemical literature is debatable); it rather demonstrated the author’s command of the existing literature on alchemy, validated the theories and procedures he chose to expound upon, and situated him within a centuries-old textual tradition.

What the readers could deduce from these quotations, the \textit{mü’ellif-i cedīd} himself made explicit on a number of occasions. In \textit{Durar al-anwār}, the author candidly admits his early confusion and trials, remarking that even working with an experienced instructor, in the person of Sheikh Aḥmed Ṣārūḫānī, had been of no avail. It was only upon his reading of Jaldakī’s writings that offer “interpretations of the opinions of sages” (\textit{tafāsīr aqwāl al-ḥukamā}), that God had unlocked his hidden treasures to the author, who was then able to overcome the difficulties posed by alchemical symbols (\textit{rumūz}).\textsuperscript{276} To be sure, anyone could read Jaldakī and benefit from his expertise—the \textit{mü’ellif-i cedīd}, however, was interested in claiming much more than that. In a brilliantly intertextual passage in his \textit{Sirr al-asrār}, the author begins the conclusion of this work by quoting extensively from the conclusion of Jaldakī’s \textit{al-Burhān}, which addresses a future reader not-yet-born: in the ninth century (\textit{al-qarn at-tāsi’)}, this chosen brother would attain a perfect understanding of the knowledge possessed by Jaldakī, and become the inheritor

\textsuperscript{275} See above, fn. 38.
\textsuperscript{276} \textit{Durar al-anwār}, Millet MS Ali Emiri 2842, fol. 1a.
of his wisdom. The mü’ellif-i cedīd notes that it is presently the ninth century and that no one had yet risen to the occasion since the time of Jaldakī; he then triumphantly proclaims himself the brother who had been prophesized. The author alone had uncovered “all the allegorical gems, or substances,” (jam’ī al-jawāhir al-marmūzāt) in Jaldakī’s writings, a feat that no aspiring sage had accomplished until that time.\footnote{Sirr al-asrār, Millet MS Ali Emiri 2827, fol. 32b. Jaldakī’s predetermined designation of the mü’ellif-i cedīd as his successor is reminiscent of the Shi‘ī doctrine of imamate succession by designation (naṣṣ), and can perhaps be best interpreted in the light of the studies on Islamic alchemy’s implicit links with Shi‘ī mysticism. See, for example, Pierre Lory, Alchimie et mystique en terre d’Islam (Paris: Gallinard, 1989), especially pp. 121-25.}

The connection between the mü’ellif-i cedīd and Jaldakī did not remain static. The authority of the latter, which had empowered the writings of the author in the earlier part of his career, was gradually subjugated to that of his own. In the Kashf al-asrār, he had proudly called Jaldakī his teacher and indeed the teacher of all sages until the end of times (ustādnā wa ustād al-kullī ilā ākhir az-zamān).\footnote{Kashf al-asrār, Istanbul University MS A 6092, fol. 54a.} Seven years later, in the Durar al-anwār, after recommending the careful study of Jaldakī’s books, the author praises the superiority of his own writings by comparing them to those of his “teacher.” Thus, his Durrat al-ghawwās fī asrār al-khawāṣṣ (“The Pearl of the Diver for the Secrets of the Properties”) was “more useful” (ahsan al-fawā‘īd) than [Jaldakī’s] Kanz al-ikhtiṣāṣ, his aforementioned Kashf al-asrār is “more useful and better organized” (ahsan al-fawā‘īd wa ‘t-tartīb) than [Jaldakī’s] al-Burhān, and his Tarwīḥ al-arwāḥ fī asrār al-miftāḥ (“The Purification of Spirits for the Key of Secrets”) is “better at uncovering and explaining [secrets]” (ahsan fī’l-kashf wa ‘l-īdāh) than [Jaldakī’s] al-Miṣbaḥ [fī asrar ‘ilm al-miftah].\footnote{Durar al-anwār, Millet MS Ali Emiri 2842, fol. 32b.}

The mü’ellif-i cedīd’s efforts to present himself not only as the inheritor but also the replacement of Jaldakī’s expertise in the art would continue after the writing of this passage and
appear to have determined the direction of some of his writings: for example his ْتُوْلِي’ ْال-بُدُرُ، a commentary on the ْشُدْحُرُ ْال-دَّهَابُ، was almost certainly intended to supplant Jaldaki’s ْغَيْـثُ ْعـسَـرُ ْفَ ْشَرَحُ ْدِوْـانُ ْعـشْدُحُرُ on the same subject. There is also the curious mirroring of certain events from the life of Jaldakī in that of the ْمِعْلِفَيـ ْالـمَّـعـلَمُ، the aforementioned narratives of prolonged and wide-ranging travel in search of alchemical knowledge, however, might indeed be a topos. Whether or not the latter author had been inspired by the former to incorporate such details in his own writings, the outcome is a closer, and “fateful,” relationship between the two men. Let us now turn to a figure just as enigmatic as the ْمِعْلِفَيـ ْالـمَّـعـلَمُ، one whom he consistently identified as his instructor in alchemy: Aḥmed Şemseddīn Şarūḥānī. In a group of writings that is sorely lacking in autobiographical information, his teacher(s) inevitably became one of the focal points of seventeenth-century narratives about the ْمِعْلِفَيـ ْالـمَّـعـلَمُ.

Aḥmed Şarūḥānī, the blind sheikh, and Molla ‘Arab

By far the most significant of the autobiographical hints provided by the author, and one that is temptingly open to scholarly speculation, is the name of his instructor in alchemy: Aḥmed Şemseddīn of Şarūḥān, a region in western Anatolia controlling the rich alluvial plains of the River Gediz (Hermus). The author calls Aḥmed Şemseddīn not only his teacher (устândā), but also his father (ابْن). While the latter was most likely to have been meant figuratively, the frequent addition of “اـش-Şarūḥānī” to ‘Alī Çelebi’s name alongside, and sometimes in preference

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280 Less tangible but more intriguing are certain similarities in the life stories of Jaldakī and the ْمِعْلِفَيـ ْالـمَّـعـلَمُ, such as the claims of both men that they had travelled throughout the Islamic world for knowledge. It is impossible to say if the ْمِعْلِفَيـ ْالـمَّـعـلَمُ was appropriating elements from Jaldakī’s writings, or, in the absence of autographs, if these were later interpolations by overzealous copyists.
to, his other toponymic epithets, “ar-Rūmī” (Anatolian) and “al-İznīkî” (of Iznik), in the manuscript tradition suggests some confusion as to the relationship between the two men.281 Aḥmed Şemseddîn Şarūḫānî is one of the few contemporaries mentioned by the author, whose works are otherwise dominated by alchemists of long-ago. What makes him a truly intriguing figure, quite apart from the abovementioned implications of his provenance and occupation, is his possible identification as the famous late-fifteenth Turkish mystic Aḥmed Şemseddîn, a Ḥalveti sheikh from the small lakeside town of Marmara (present-day Gölmarmara) in Şarūḫān, about sixty-kilometers east of Manisa.282 Sheikh Aḥmed Şemseddîn, also known by his Turkish honorific epithet Yiğitbāş Velî, was the founder of the Aḥmediye, or the so-called “middle branch” (ortakol) of the Ḥalveti Sufi order, from which a number of prestigious sub-branches would spring in the subsequent centuries, including the Sinānîye, the Mıṣrîye, and the Cerrâḥîye.283

While this Ḥalvetî sheikh is the author of several important Turkish treatises about mysticism, he is not known to have written on the subject of alchemy—the only alchemical text ascribed to a certain Aḥmed Şemseddîn Şarūḫānî, found in Süleymaniye MS Bağdatlı Vehbi 1017, is in fact an excerpt from the final section of Kashf al-āsrār, in which the sheikh is quoted.

281 Kashf al-āsrār, Istanbul University MS T 6092, 58b. It should be noted that the province of Şarūḫān does not include the city of Iznik.

282 Sheikh Aḥmed Şarūḫānî’s traditionally accepted date of death in 1504-05 is problematic only if ’Alî Beg b. Hürev is accepted as the author of the ’Alî Çelebî-corpus and if the date of death for Sheikh Aḥmed Şarūḫānî is indeed correct. The reliability of this date has been convincingly challenged by Necdet Okumuş, who suggests that Aḥmed Şarūḫānî was likely to have been alive into the 1520s, the earliest. See Necdet Okumuş “Yeni Kaynakların Işığında Ahmed Şemseddin Marmaravi (Yiğitbaş) Hakkındaki Bazı Yanlışların Düzeltilmesi” Kubbealtı Akademi Mecmuası 25: IV (1996), 175-183. Nonetheless, the issue is far from settled as a number of scholars have criticized this re-dating and its possible implications. See Ahmet Ögke, Yiğitbaş Velî Ahmed Şemseddin-i Marmaravi (İstanbul: İnsan Yayınları, 2001),

283 The most recent work on the development of the Halveti order in its Ottoman context is John Curry, The Transformation of Muslim Mystical Thought in the Ottoman Empire: The Rise of the Halveti Order, 1350-1750 (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010).
speaking on his deathbed. In this evocative passage, Aḥmed Şemseddīn, whom the mūʾellif-i cedīd earlier accuses of having withheld some of his acquired wisdom from him, reassures his student that alchemy is a science (ʿilm) about whose verity there is no doubt or suspicion (lā shakk wa lā shubha), and then emphatically stresses that this science constitutes a spiritual path (ṭarīq rūḥānī) for the “minting of men” (sukūk al-insān). While the statement itself is not exactly unusual, in the sense that alchemy had never been approached as a road to riches by its practitioners of a mystical persuasion, it is nonetheless a rare allusion, particularly in such a technical treatise, to the notion that alchemical procedures should be understood by the initiated as allegories for the transmutation of the human soul.

Remarkably, the Ḥalvetī sheikh Aḥmed Şemseddīn does explicitly dwell on this very subject in the Risāle-i Tevhīd (“The Treatise of Oneness”), one of his more famous works on mysticism. The twelfth chapter of this treatise comments on the typically nebulous borders of the “science of wisdom” (ʿilm-i hikmet). After having defined this branch of knowledge as one that attempts to know the “customs of God” (ʿadetullāh), Aḥmed Şemseddīn further divides it into two parts concerned with the exoteric (ẓāhirī) and the esoteric (bāṭūnī): the former, encompassing everything that pertains to the order of the natural world, constitutes a model (mīsāl) for the latter, which is concerned with the human soul and the ways in which it can be guided to perfection. In the same vein, the exoteric power of the prophets to perform acts of transmutation (kimyā) constituted a model for the sheikhs’ esoteric ability to transform their

284 Kashf al-asrār, Istanbul University MS T 6092, fols. 67a-b. The excerpt in Bağdatlı Vehbi 1017, 72b-73a begins by quoting the dying alchemist in the original Arabic of Kashf al-asrār, and then seamlessly switches to a Turkish translation of his parting words concerning the art.
285 An imagery that contrasts the true aim of alchemy with that of the practitioners who are only interested in it for worldly gains.
disciples’ souls through inculcation (*telkīn*). With this second, and parallel, model, Aḥmed Şemseddīn provides an alternative reading of alchemy: God’s saints (*evliyā*) had hidden the true meaning of the stages and ranks of the soul’s journey to perfection in alchemical allegories, whereby the sheikh’s inculcation, for example, which had the power to transform a follower’s soul, is represented by the elixir that turns base metals into gold.

The prism through which alchemy is viewed as seen in the final teaching spoken by the mü’ellif-i cedīd’s master in *Kashf al-asrār* unmistakably resembles that of Aḥmed Şemseddīn in *Risāle-i Tevhīd*. While the close relationship between the two passages is intriguing, this is not sufficient to establish a link between the two figures. Fortunately, there are further hints, albeit equally ambiguous, in the AÇ corpus. The author writes that his master in the alchemical arts, Aḥmed Şemseddīn, himself had been the student (*tilmīdh*) of a certain blind sheikh from Egypt named ‘Alī al-Marjūshī. Apparently from the Marjūsh district of Cairo, Sheikh ‘Alī had arrived in the Ottoman realms during the reign of Bāyezīd II (r. 1481-1512), and then, at an unknown time, returned to Egypt. According to a passage in the *Durar al-anwār*, he was later executed there by “the treacherous vizier” (*al-wazīr al-khāʾīn*) during the early years (*awāʾīl*) of Sultan Süleymān’s (r. 1520-66) reign.

The vizier in question can be identified with certainty as Ḥāʾin Aḥmed Pasha (Aḥmed Pasha the Traitor), who rebelled against the Porte in 1523, according to the traditional accounts of these events, after having been unorthodoxly passed over for promotion to the grand vizierate

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287 Ibid., pp. 134-35.
288 It must be noted that the mystical interpretation of alchemy provided by Aḥmed Şemseddīn is distinct from that found in the Jābirian corpus, which, drawing on neo-Platonic ideas, situates alchemy within an Ismailī cosmology. Aḥmed Şemseddīn’s reading is not concerned with the links between the micro- and the macrocosmos as such, but rather those between the *murshid* (the Sufi guide) and his *murīd* (the disciple) on their transcendental journey to oneness with God.
289 *Durar al-anwār*, Millet MS Ali Emiri 2842, fol. 32a.
in favor of the Sultan’s inexperienced favorite, Ibrāhim Pasha of Parga. The rebellion of a resentful vizier is all-too-familiar in the annals of Ottoman history, but that of Ahmed Pasha posed a more imminent threat due to its localition and the particular political circumstances surrounding it: the Mamluk Sultanate had been brought to an abrupt end by Süleymān’s father Selīm I (r. 1512-20) six short years earlier, and the local power structure had been largely left intact by the Ottomans. There had already been several uprisings against Ottoman rule both in Egypt and Syria when Aḥmed Pasha, recently appointed as the governor of the former territory, unsuccessfully attempted to establish his sovereignty in Egypt with the help of the local Mamluks. A particularly bloody episode in the early history of Ottoman Egypt, the uprising had pitted rival factions of Mamluks, janissaries, and the Bedouins against one another, culminating in the unceremonious killing of Aḥmed Pasha in March 1524 and the re-establishment of Ottoman rule in the province with the arrival of the grand vizier Ibrāhim Pasha.290

Our sources for this chain of events, which are for the most part predictably unanimous in their denunciation of Aḥmed Pasha, also point to a number of politically motivated executions overseen by the rebellious vizier during his short tenure in Cairo.291 It is in this context that the execution of ‘Alī al-Marjūshī must be considered, rather than that of his unwillingness to reveal the secrets of alchemy to the “treacherous vizier” as claimed in the Durar al-anwār. An interesting parallel to this otherwise obscure event can be found in the ill-treatment of several prominent Sufi sheikhs of Cairo during Ibrāhim Pasha’s stay in Egypt. Among them was the

291 Traditional accounts of the Ahmed Pasha’s revolt have recently been re-examined, using contemporary Venetian documents and a number of previously ignored local historians, by Ebru Turan who convincingly argues that Ahmed Pasha “rebelled” against the Porte only after his final dismissal from vizierate (and the impending threat of execution). See Ebru Turan, “The Sultan’s Favorite: Ibrahim Paşa and the Making of the Ottoman Universal Sovereignty in the reign of Sultan Süleyman, 1516-1526” (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Chicago, 2007), 196. On Ibrahim Pasha of Parga and Ahmed Pasha, also see Giancarlo Casale, The Ottoman Age of Exploration (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 34-53.
Ḫalveti sheik İbrāhim Gülşenī, whose high-profile trial and acquittal in Istanbul betrayed the uneasiness with which the Porte regarded the popularity of provincial mystics. The meteoric rise of the Safavid Sufi order in Azerbaijan, whose charismatic sheikhs transformed it into a formidable military and political force within three generations, set a dangerous precedent in the eyes of the Ottoman rulers who continued to be apprehensive about Sufi sheikhs with large followings in the provinces well into the seventeenth century.²⁹²

In any case, it is possible to conclude that the blind sheikh ‘Alî al-Marjūshī was likely to have been one of the victims of Aḥmed Pasha’s short-lived rule in Cairo in the latter part of the year 1523. The lack of any references to him in the biographical dictionaries produced in the imperial center and in Egypt alike might suggest that the circles in which he operated were not the ones frequented by the learned men of Istanbul or Cairo.²⁹³ It is to be expected that many popular mystics of the period, having neither authored notable works nor held judicial offices, are nowhere to be found in the bio-bibliographic literature of the period in consideration. Nonetheless, there is a genre, namely hagiographies, in which these arguably marginal figures can often be encountered as the main actors of the narrative, or at least as participants in the stories relating to the lives and miracles of a velî (“saint”). One such miracle story (menkibe) preserved by the disciples of Aḥmed Şemseddîn Şarūḥānî is of particular interest to us as it relates a fateful meeting between the sheikh and a certain scholar from Egypt.

The menkibe in question begins with a brief word about the circumstances that form its background; Aḥmed Şemseddîn’s miracles (kerāmet) had become so widely known that his reputation reached even Egypt, where a man known for his learning, referred to by the narrator

²⁹² The infamous example of Sheikh Maḥmūd of Diyarbekir, who had been executed by Murâd IV in 1639, has already been explored above. See Chapter 1.
²⁹³ Besides the major biographical works already mentioned, the major source for Egyptian scholars of our period, ash-Sha’rānî’s at-Ṭabaqāt al-kubrā, also does not include any information about a sheikh ‘Alî al-Marjūshī.
simply as Molla ‘Arab, decided to travel to Manisa in Şārūḥān to test the sheikh’s famed holiness. According to the story, a number of jealous inhabitants of the town, who desperately wanted to see Aḥmed Ṣemseddīn humiliated, welcomed Molla ‘Arab and openly criticized the sheikh. Aḥmed Ṣemseddīn then had his disciples greet Molla ‘Arab by name, to the latter’s surprise, at the entrance of his dervish lodge—a well-established topos in Muslim hagiographies expressing the holy man’s prescience. Once together, the two men agree to enter the erbaʾīn (the “forty,” in reference to the forty-day long isolation practiced in many Sufi orders to train the self) with one caveat: they could eat whatever they wished, this being an unorthodox practice for such spiritual retreats, but they could not exit their respective cells to relieve themselves. As Molla ‘Arab was sustaining himself with a handful of black olives, he could see Aḥmed Ṣemseddīn feasting on lamb meat in an adjacent cell. And yet it was miraculously the former, not the latter, man, who had to leave solitary confinement to relieve himself in the end. Unable to contain his amazement, Molla ‘Arab asks how it was possible for anyone to not visit the outhouse after consuming such quantities of lamb meat, to which Aḥmed Ṣemseddīn wisely replied: “This is the difference between a mollā and a sheikh.” Molla ‘Arab then became, as expected, a disciple of the sheikh. 294

Aḥmed Ṣemseddīn’s rather unusual digestive miracle has obvious apologetic overtones: in an Ottoman society where the charismatic spirituality and the devotional practices promoted by certain Sufi sheikhs were questioned, or openly criticized, by some medrese-trained scholars, such stories sought to establish the authority of the mystic over the jurist. It is also noteworthy that in our story, the Turkish Sufi confronts by a learned Arab from Egypt, for centuries famed as being the heart of Sunni learning. Thus the mystic’s intimate and inner knowledge of God

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294 For this and several other miracle stories collated from various MSS, see Ahmet Ögke, Yiğitbaş Veli Ahmed Ṣemseddīn Marmaravi: hayati, eserleri, ve tasavvufi görüşleri (Istanbul: İhsan Yayınları, 2001).
triumphs over not just any scholar, but one who is presumed to have received the finest education with respect to the laws of Islam. The molla, whose relationship with God is stereotypically superficial and dictated by the exoteric practices established by the Qur’an and the traditions of the Prophet Muḥammad, is powerless before the mutual love between the mystic and his Creator.

Having underlined the social context of the menkibe above, we can legitimately pose the following question: was this story an elaboration, rather than the fabrication, of an actual meeting between Aḥmed Şemseddīn and a certain learned man from Egypt? With so many unknowns, it would be far-fetched to even contemplate that this Molla ‘Arab can be our ‘Alī al-Marjūshī. Nonetheless, the question itself cannot easily be dismissed as historical naivité. For “Molla ‘Arab,” despite his undeniably generic character, also happens to be the popular epithet for two specific scholars of the period.295 One of these men, Vā‘iz (“Preacher”) Muḥammed b. ʿŌmer, originally from Antakya, but educated primarily in Egypt, was famous for his close relationship with the Mamluk Sultan Qā’īt Bāy (r. 1468-95). Upon the death of his patron, Vā‘iz Muḥammed—or Molla ‘Arab as he is better known in the Ottoman sources—travelled extensively in western Anatolia and the Balkans, eventually settling in Bursa in 1526, where he died six years later.296 It is therefore not improbable that he could have made acquaintance with Aḥmed Şemseddīn in Manisa. Indeed, the menkibe itself suggests that Molla ‘Arab was simply travelling through Manisa and decided to test the sheikh’s merits at the behest of the suspicious townsfolk—the

295 The other scholar known as “Molla ‘Arab” is ‘Alāeddīn ‘Alī, originally from Aleppo, who had, interestingly enough, stayed in Manisa during the tenure of Mehmed II’s son Mustafa as an administrator there, presumably before 1468, when Mustafa was appointed as the governor of the newly-annexed Karaman principality in central Anatolia. Following Mustafa’s death, he was able to establish himself as a respected jurist in Istanbul, where he became the müfti in 1488. See Richard C. Repp, The Mūfti of Istanbul (London: Ithaca Press, 1986), pp. 174-80.

296 See Ṭaṣkoprızade, Shagā ‘iṣ an-nu ‘māniyyah, p. 462.
sheikh’s fame in Egypt, as well as the events that supposedly transpired during the erba ‘īn, likely being an embellishment thereof.

Such a meeting between Aḥmed Şemseddīn and Vāʿīz Muḥammed is interesting not only because of the latter’s itinerary after Qāʾit Bāy’s death, but also due to Vāʿīz Muḥammed’s well-known expertise in alchemy. Ṭāşköprizāde’s Shaqāʾiq an-nuʿmāniyyah, unambiguously refers to Molla ʿArab’s mastery of the alchemical arts and mentions that he had authored a number of important treatises on this subject, without, however, enumerating the titles. Fortunately, the collections of three manuscript libraries in Turkey (Millet and Istanbul University in Istanbul, and Zeytinoğlu in Tavşanlı, Kütahya), which include the copies of two surviving works by Molla ‘Arab, enable us to confirm Ṭāşköprizāde’s account.297

Conclusion

Can all of this be a simple coincidence, a cruel joke played on the historian’s imagination by the ambiguity of our limited sources? We can neither establish conclusively that the two Aḥmed Şemseddīn Şarūḥānīs (the teacher of the mūʾ ellīf-i cedīd and the famous Ḥalvetī sheikh) are the one and the same person, nor that the Molla ʿArab who was bested by the latter is the Molla ‘Arab known for his alchemical writings. With the surviving textual evidence we cannot resolve such ambiguities—but neither do we need to. These were, after all, exactly the sorts of problems faced by the seventeenth-century Ottoman readership of the corpus that was attempting

297 These are the Talkhīṣ al-Bayān (“The Epitome of Bayān”) and the Talkhīṣ ar-Ruṭbat al-ḥakīm (“The Epitome of Ruṭbat al-ḥakīm”), the two works being abridgements of, and short commentaries on, Jābir b. Ḥayyān’s Kitāb al-bayān and the tenth-century Andalusian sage Maslama al-Majrīfī’s Ruṭbat al-ḥakīm respectively. It is also worth noting that the earliest known copy of the latter treatise, with the alternative title Mukhtasar ar-Ruṭbat al-ḥakīm (“The Abridgement of Ruṭbat al-ḥakīm”), is found in the very same manuscript that contains the oldest dated copies of two works by ʿAlī Çelebī in Istanbul University MS AY 6247.
to fashion an identity, and a life-story, for its countryman who had laid an assertive claim to being the successor to Jaldakī and the new master of divine knowledge until the coming of the next age.

It is conceivable that some of this readership did not have immediate access to Kātib Çelebi’s *Kashf az-zunūn* and/or ‘Aṭā’ī’s *Ḥadāʾikuʿ l-ḥaḳāʾiḳ*, or, if they did, they chose to ignore the narrative found therein. Indeed either of these must be true as evident from the multiple author figures that emerged in the manuscript traditions over the course of the seventeenth century side by side with ‘Alī Beg b. Ḥüsrev. The great weakness of the latter figure is that he is not confirmed by the autobiographical contents of the AÇ corpus, meager as they might be. The fact that Kātib Çelebi does not mention any autobiographical details from the corpus to support his identification of the author is to be expected—this would be beyond the scope of his massive project, and, besides, it is possible that he had only read the first and the last pages of the *Kashf al-asrār* and *Sirr ar-rabbānī*. The ‘Alī Beg b. Ḥüsrev in ‘Aṭā’ī, however, poses a more pressing problem: not only is the precious little information revealed by the author of the AÇ corpus about himself missing from the narrative, but also no work from the corpus or even alchemy itself is mentioned. If this was to the liking of ‘Alī Beg, who may have had his reasons for keeping his master-chemist identity hidden, it was almost certainly unacceptable to his audience. Over the course of the seventeenth century, they were to suggest various other identities and create a number of appropriate biographical sketches for the author, but none more compelling than the great Eşrefzade ‘Alī Çelebi.
CHAPTER FOUR

Eşrefzade 'Alî Çelebi and the Ḳādirī-Eşrefī Sufi order

An unblemished yet slightly faded black and white photograph displays the deserted entrance of a mosque. Flanked on both sides by raised wooden platforms on which the faithful take off their shoes, the gate of the building is slightly ajar, inviting inside the worshipper and the curious visitor alike. Visualizing the colors of the elegant Iznik tiles that adorn the mosque’s walls is left to our imagination—without a doubt including white, the many shades of green and blue, and perhaps even the fabled crimson. The floral decorations on the tiles surround a large wāw letter to the left of the entryway, which stands for al-Wadūd, the Loving, one of the ninety-nine asmā’ al-ḥusnā or “the most beautiful names” of God. Less conspicuous is another calligraphic depiction on the far left corner framing one of the mosque’s windows. It reads ‘Alī twice, both from the right to the left and from the left to the right, and is painted in the manner of a human face, its pair of ‘ayn-shaped eyes, the first letter of the name, staring back at the

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298 The asmā’ al-ḥusnā is a terminology that is derived from the Qur’an itself, more specifically the verses 7:180, 17:110, 20:8, and 59:24, all of which share the same formulation: lahu al-asmā’ al-ḥusnā (“To Him belong the most beautiful names.”) The number of “the most beautiful names” of Allah, which is not mentioned in the Qur’an, is based on Prophetic tradition. The hadith in question has been recorded in the Šahīḥ al-Buhārī and is thus considered among the most trustworthy traditions: “Allah has ninety-nine Names, one-hundred less one; and he who memorized them all by heart will enter Paradise.” See Šahīḥ al-Buhārī IX: 93, 489. The properties with which these names were believed to be infused, and their spiritual and magical uses, spawned a great amount of literature in the Islamic world down to modern times. In the Ottoman world, one of the earliest and most influential works on the 99 names of Allah was a didactic poem composed by Ilyās ibn ‘Īsā Ṣarūḫānī in 1541, the Șerḥ-i esmā-i hüsna. Consisting of 868 couplets, the poem circulated widely beyond the Bayrāmī circles to which Sheikh Ilyās belonged. The manuscript copies of the work are found in numerous libraries and include the Istanbul University MS 3487, and Süleymaniye MSS Hacı Mahmud Efendi 3629 and Lalali 1591. For an interesting discussion of the relationship between the Allah’s names, in particular those with creative properties, and architecture, see Samer Akkach, *Cosmology and Architecture in Premodern Islam: An Architectural Reading of Mystical Ideas* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2005), pp. 49-52.
The twin presence of the wāw and ‘Alī silently proclaims to the visitors that this is no ordinary mosque.

This photograph, presently among the holdings of the Fine Arts Library of the Harvard College Library, was produced in the closing years of the nineteenth century as part of a more ambitious project initiated by Sultan ‘Abdülhamid II (r. 1875-1908) with the aim of visually documenting the Ottoman Empire. It was taken in Iznik, the ancient Nikaia, just outside of the Eşrefzāde tekke-mosque, the headquarters (āsitāne) of the Eşrefī Sufi order. In this particular instance, ‘Abdülhamid II’s project had inadvertently fulfilled a historic role. A short twenty years later, the retreating Greek forces stationed in the town would destroy the entire compound, leaving behind only the minaret of the mosque and the charred tombs of several Eşrefī sheikhs. As if this tragic event had broken the protective power of the holy men over the site, one calamity followed another in the troubled twentieth century: first, in 1925 and under the new Republican regime, all dervish lodges were forcibly shut down. The mosque alone was rebuilt in

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299 The calligraphic execution of the name of ‘Alī as a human face is a well-known practice that aimed to display the potential godhood of mankind and whose philosophical roots can be traced back to the fourteenth-century Ḥurūfī movement. See Hamid Algar, “The Hurūfī Influence on Bektashism” in Alexandre Popovic and Gilles Veinstein, eds., Bektachiyaya: Études sur l’ordre mystique des Bektachis et les groups relevant de Hadji Bektach (İstanbul: Isis, 1995), pp. 39-43.

300 The photograph bears the mark of Sébah & Joaillier, a firm based in Istanbul. With the combined efforts of Johannes’ father Pascal Sébah, a Catholic native of Syria, and the Frenchman Joailler, Sébah & Joailler had become one of the most successful photography studios in the imperial capital. When Sultan ‘Abdülhamid II (r. 1875-1908) initiated the said project, Sébah & Joailler were among the companies whose services were employed. Another company involved in the project was the famous Abdullah Frères, an Armenian family also based in Istanbul. They had started the family business in 1858 and remained in operation until 1900, in which year they were acquired by Sébah & Joailler, together with their entire inventory. As a result, many photographs that had been taken by Abdullah Frères bear the company stamp of Sébah & Joailler. It is not possible to ascertain if this is the case for the photograph in question. A general history of the former company is the subject of a monograph by Engin Özendes, Abdullah Frères: Ottoman Court Photographers (İstanbul: Yapı Kredi Kültür, 1998). For the historical contextualization of photography with respect to Ottoman modernization, and the role played by these two studios in the collection of visual evidence for the Sultan’s realms, is offered in Wendy M.K. Shaw, Possessors and Possessed: Museums, Archaeology, and the Visualization of History in the Late Ottoman Empire (Berkeley and Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 2003), pp. 139-48. Also see Wendy M.K. Shaw, “Ottoman Photography of the Late Nineteenth Century: An ‘Innocent’ Modernism?” History of Photography 33:1 (February, 2009), pp. 80-93.

301 The Eşrefī compound was not the only monument to be affected by the Greco-Turkish war in Iznik, the Kutbeddīn Mehmed mosque, among many others, was also completely destroyed, as were the famous ceramics ateliers of the city. See Saim Ülgen, “İznik’te Türk Eserleri” in Vakıflar Dergisi I (1964), pp. 54-55.
1954, by which time the rest of the compound lay in ruins, but suffered extensive damage in an earthquake in 1967 that destroyed the top of the original minaret. The restored mosque fared even worse during the deadly 1999 earthquake and had to be demolished completely in its aftermath. More recently, a new mosque has been built, which is faithful in its plan to the Ottoman construction. Much of the decorations of the old building are forever lost to history, however, the photograph in the Harvard College Library being one of their last reminders.

From the establishment of the tekke-mosque in the fifteenth century to its unceremonious demise in the twentieth, almost no visitor to Iznik had exited its Roman-era city walls without visiting the āsitāne of the Eşrefī order or learning something about it. Its founder ‘Abdullāh Rūmī ibn Eşref was for all intents and purposes the patron saint of the town, and his tomb for centuries attracted pilgrims, among them Sultans and other dignitaries, from throughout the Ottoman Empire and beyond.302 Even as a relatively minor sub-branch of the greater Ḍādirī path, the Eşrefiyye was able to exert a great deal of cultural and intellectual influence on other Sufi orders of the Ottoman world, due in large part to its prolific sheikhs, an enthusiastic base of lay followers, and, above all, the great fame of its founder as a wonder-worker and composer of simple yet powerful devotional poems and hymns. The present chapter picks up the thread from the previous one by examining the most widely accepted identity for the author of the AÇ corpus in the early modern period, Eşrefzāde ‘Alī, and subsequently explores the blurred zone where the production and the transmission of alchemical knowledge crossed ways with the Eşrefī order. I do not argue that members of the order were the sole actors in this story—it is even within the realm of possibility that no Eşrefī had actually taken any part in it (even though there is evidence suggesting otherwise). What is interesting here are the ways in which many early modern readers

302 For two of the more important visitors, see below, p. 181.
had associated the corpus, as well as a number of other works on alchemy, with the Eşrefī order, and the implications of this association for our understanding of those very readers and how they contextualized scientific texts that, in many cases, did not have a context.

In the process of exploring these issues, we will also note some of the more substantial evidence supporting the notion that alchemy and Sufism have organic links and that alchemical texts are often open to, and even seem to encourage, variant readings. To those familiar with the modern scholarship on Western or Chinese alchemy, the historiographical literatures for which often do recognize both the spiritual and the practical dimensions of the “sacred art,” it might seem peculiar that such evidence must be collected at all. The reason for making such an effort is not to state the obvious, but to counter the exclusively positivist reading of alchemical texts that is still prevalent among many historians of Islamic science. A more important reason yet is to show that the said links between alchemy and mysticism were not static, but differed substantially according to the time and place. As we have observed in the third chapter, based in part on evidence that will be more thoroughly explored in the present and the next one, the mystical readings of alchemical texts in the early modern Ottoman world were not identical with

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303 In the case of Western alchemy in particular, these two dimensions have each been given precedence by competing historiographies. Much of the debate revolves around the degree to which alchemy had contributed to the Scientific Revolution. The “new historiography of alchemy,” advanced by a number of historians including William Newman and Lawrence Principe, holds that the impact of alchemy on the emergence of modern sciences had been significant, especially with respect to the growing emphasis on experimentation. Almost diametrically opposed to this line of argument, championed above all by Brian Vickers, is a reading of the esoteric branches of knowledge in general and of alchemy in particular that has prioritized the element of mysticism and has rejected the notion of a significant contribution on the part of these occult sciences to the Scientific Revolution. For the historians of the sciences in the Islamic world, the “absence” of a paradigm shift in the ways in which scientific knowledge was produced until well into the nineteenth century has precluded a similar historiographical debate. On the surface, however, the contested readings of alchemical texts, as essentially mystical (by Henri Corbin and Pierre Lory) or scientific (by Georges Anawati), is reminiscent of the former debate, and the position of Anawati can mistakenly be equated with that of the new historians of alchemy. Not only would such a parallel be inaccurate, but almost the opposite is true: Anawati’s exclusively positivist reading of alchemical texts is engendered by a concern to establish (or, depending on the audience, reaffirm) the position of Arab learning at the very roots of modern sciences. In other words his position, one that still dominates the historiography of Islamic sciences to this day, has more similarities with George Sarton’s dismissive attitude towards occult sciences than with the revisionist studies of Newman or Principe.
those of the ‘Ismaili circles of the Abbasid period in and among which some of the most influential Arabic alchemical texts had been produced. In the following pages, our attention will first rest on the *Divān-i ḥikmet* and the role it played in the emergence of the Eşrefzâde ‘Alî figure as a viable candidate for the author of the corpus. We will next turn to ‘Abdullâh Rûmî, the founder of the Eşrefî order, and then to the order itself, in order to investigate the textual evidence for the real and imagined role played by Eşrefî sheikhs, disciples, and devotees in the (re-)production of alchemical knowledge.

The *Divān-i ḥikmet* and Eşrefzâde ‘Alî

Despite having been accepted by learned Ottoman librarians, and championed by modern historians, the name ‘Alî Beg ibn Ḥüsrev had stirred little passion in those early modern readers who had been seeking the author of the corpus: for all the authority of Kâtib Çelebi, ‘Alî Beg was never able to escape the confines of title pages and library cards. This is in sharp contrast to Eşrefzâde ‘Alî, an alternate identity for the author-figure, whose enormous popularity among the corpus’ seventeenth and eighteenth-century readership is in need of careful historical analysis. The family name Eşrefzâde (“son of Eşref”) came to be applied to the author of the corpus rather unexpectedly. At the turn of the seventeenth century, when much of the works that would eventually comprise the corpus were in existence and in varying levels of circulation within the Ottoman world, the readership of the corpus appears to have been completely oblivious to this name as a possible identifier for the elusive author figure. As noted in the third chapter, some of the works from the corpus had already been associated with one another through the recognition

of their common authorship before they were ever attributed to a specific author. Others, such as the Divān-ı hikmet, one of the most important (and by far the longest) Turkish alchemical poems produced in the Ottoman period, were to be included in the corpus at a relatively late point.

Among these later additions to the corpus, the Divān-ı hikmet is unique, however, in the sense that it not only joined a gradually growing body of works thought to be the work of a single alchemist, but also fundamentally changed the way in which many early modern Ottoman readers of these works imagined their author. Like an application of the red elixir that was expected to transmutate base metals into precious ones, the inclusion of the Divān-ı hikmet within the nascent corpus initiated a process that would change the author-figure into a formidable and quasi-historical mystic with whom Kātib Çelebî’s ‘Alî Beg could not hope to compete. Before this process of textual transformation can be described in full, a brief introduction of the Divān-ı hikmet and of its textual history is in order.

Not to be confused with its namesake, the collection of mystical poems attributed to the twelfth-century Turkic Sufi Ahmed Yesevî (d. 562/1166-67), the late sixteenth-century Divān-ı hikmet is a Turkish mnemotechnical poem that is concerned with the creation of the philosopher’s stone.\textsuperscript{305} Given the considerable number of its extant manuscript copies, it is possible to conclude that the Divān-ı hikmet had been among the most popular of texts from within the corpus.\textsuperscript{306} Comprised of 571 couplets in its most complete version, the work is of a noteworthy length that did not deter from its popularity, which must have at least in part

\textsuperscript{305} Ahmed Yesevî’s work is noteworthy for being one of the earliest didactic texts on mysticism in any Turkic dialect and is contemporary with the formative years of Persian Sufi literature. For an evaluation of Yasawî’s collection of poetry, see Mehmed Fuad Köprülü, Early Mystics in Turkish Literature, tr. Gary Leiser and Robert Dankoff (New York: Routledge, 2006), pp. 127-70.

\textsuperscript{306} Some of its earliest copies include Istanbul University MS TY 7016, Vienna MS AF 326, Nuruosmaniye MS 3621, Konya Mevlana Museum MS 2794, Atatürk MS Muallim Cevdet Yz 180, and Süleymaniye MS Hacı Mahmud Efendi 3666.
stemmed from the fact that its versified contents facilitated memorization.\footnote{Mnemotechnical poems on diverse subjects ranging from medicine to legal matters are a common feature of Islamic literature. Mnemotechnical poems were also a common feature of the Western classical tradition, such as Marcus Manilius’ \textit{Astronomica}, a Latin poem on astrology.} It was mentioned in the previous chapter that in its organization, the \textit{Divān-ı ḥikmet} closely followed the example of an older, and widely read, Arabic alchemical poem, the \textit{Shudhûr adh-dhahab} by the Andalusian sage Abu’l Hasan ‘Alî ibn Mûsa Ibn Arfa’ Ra’s. Just like the \textit{Shudhûr}, the \textit{Divān-ı ḥikmet} treats alchemical subjects in sections that rhyme sequentially with the letters of the Arabic alphabet. If one considers the central role played by the “science of the letters” or letter-magic (‘\textit{ilm al-ḥurūf}) in Islamic alchemy, the “scientific” significance of this arrangement becomes apparent.\footnote{Considering its great significance in Islamic mysticism, and its relevance for the practice of a number of other sciences, the scholarly studies on ‘\textit{ilm al-ḥurūf} are far and few in between. Arguably the most important recent study is by Pierre Lory, \textit{La science des lettres en Islam} (Paris: Dervy, 2004).} That the \textit{Divān-ı ḥikmet}, despite having been written in the Turkish vernacular, does not include sections rhyming with the letters of the Turko-Persian alphabet, can therefore be attributed as much to its author’s desire to follow the pattern of the esteemed \textit{Shudhûr adh-dhahab} as to the fact that the Turko-Persian letters have no value in the \textit{abjād} numerical system.\footnote{The abjad numerical values are essential for ‘\textit{ilm al-ḥurūf}. The name \textit{abjād} is derived from the first four letters (\textit{alif}, \textit{ba}, \textit{jim}, \textit{dal}) of the Arabic alphabet before it was reorganized in Abbasid times. The reorganization was based on the shape of the letters and as a result the sequence of Arabic letters differs from most other alphabets derived from the Phoenician one. For the purposes of the letters’ numerical values, the older sequence of letters remained in use. The Persian and Turkish variants of the Arabic script include letters representing sounds that do not exist in Arabic: \textit{ce}, \textit{pe}, and \textit{je}. While these letters had been given numerical values by Astarabadi, the aforementioned founder of the Ḥurūfīsm, these values apparently did not find acceptance outside of Ḥurūfī circles.} Another branch of knowledge that was integral to the practice of alchemy, namely astrology, underlines the influence of the \textit{Shudhûr} on the \textit{Divān-ı ḥikmet} even more convincingly: both poems begin with an instructive remark that before any of the alchemical operations they describe can successfully be attempted, certain celestial preconditions must first be met.\footnote{On the relationship between astrology and alchemy in the early modern European intellectual tradition, for the purposes of a comparison, see William R. Newman and Anthony Grafton, “The Problematic Status of Astrology and Alchemy in Early Modern Europe” in \textit{Secrets of Nature: Astrology and Alchemy in Early Modern Europe}, eds. Anthony Grafton and William R. Newman (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2001), especially 16-17. That astrology and alchemy were “twin” sciences is a notion that can be traced back to some of the earliest alchemical texts such as the famous \textit{Tabula Smaragdina} or \textit{The Emerald Tablet}, a Hermetic text of great importance for both}
the desirable stations of the planets Mars (merîh) and Venus (zühre) in particular are remarkably similar in both works, which is suggestive, in this instance, of a direct translation from the Arabic into Turkish.\footnote{Compare the following two couplets, from the \textit{Dīvān-ı hikmet} and the \textit{Shudhūr al-dhahab} respectively: \textit{ol vaḳit zühreyle merîhe nâzır olsun, teslis olsa tesdîs olur maḳâm-ı cevza} (“let [the one seeking to uncover this knowledge] observe Venus and Mars, should they be in trine, then the position of Gemini must be in sextile”) and \textit{adha thalath al-mari̇h bî-l-zuha amrî} (“when Mars and Venus are in trine…”).}

In light of the manuscript traditions of some of the other works that were dealt with in the preceding chapter, it will come as little surprise that Eşrefzâde Alî’s \textit{Dīvān-ı hikmet} also has a pre-history, a manuscript tradition that begins with an interesting twist. The oldest surviving and visually the most striking copy of the \textit{Dīvān-ı hikmet} is found in Istanbul University MS TY 7016, which was completed by a certain ‘Ināyetullah b. ‘Alî in January/February of 1601 (Rajab, 1009).\footnote{Istanbul University MS TY 7016, fol. 12b.} The provenance of the MS TY 7016 is, unfortunately, not known. Like all extant early copies of works that at a later date constituted the corpus, this one is practically anonymous except for its rubricated title-page in Arabic that introduces the author in a thoroughly ambiguous fashion: “the sheikh [and] imam, the verifier, the most virtuous of the sages of Anatolia…the deceased author” (\textit{ash-shaikh al-imâm al-muhaqqiq afdal ḥukamā ar-rūm…al-mu’allîf al-marḥūm}).\footnote{For a discussion of the title \textit{muhaqqiq} (“verifier”) see William C. Chittick, \textit{Faith and Practice of Islam: Three Thirteenth-century Sufi Texts} (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1992), 26-27. It is noteworthy that a copy of the seventeenth-century Şerî-ı Kaşîde-i Sîr-ı Tâ-Hâ found in Istanbul University MS TY 7019 is also attributed to a certain “\textit{ash-shaikh al-imâm...afdal ḥukamā ar-rūm...al-marḥūm}.”} The word \textit{al-marḥūm} (“the late, the deceased”) is noteworthy, for the copyist was either under the impression, or actually knew, that the author in question had passed away. This title-page, which is almost certainly contemporary with the rest of the text, predates the death of

\footnote{Istanbul University MS TY 7016, fol. 12b.}
‘Alī Beg b. Hüsrev and suggests that he was not recognized as the author of the *Dīvān-i ḥikmet* by some among this work’s early seventeenth-century readership.

The MS TY 7016 is distinguished by more than its elegant penmanship, decorative flourishes, and attribution to an ambiguous author—the copy of the poem contained therein is also “incomplete.” It is admittedly peculiar to describe the oldest extant manuscript of a poem as incomplete, especially one that is, both physically and structurally, anything but: there are no missing folios in the manuscript, and neither the beginning nor the conclusion of the work betrays any signs of missing text. The transition of sections rhyming with the letters of the Arabic alphabet is seamless. And yet, one observes in these transitions a puzzling element considering what we know about the content of its later copies and that of the *Shudhūr*, on which our text had clearly been modeled. Of the twenty eight letters of the Arabic alphabet, and the corresponding twenty-eight sections in the “full” version of the *Dīvān-i ḥikmet*, in the Istanbul University copy there are only ten letter-sections present.\(^{314}\) That the missing sections are not a result of missing folios is attested by an investigation of the physical manuscript itself and the aforementioned seamless transitions from one section to the next alike. The section rhyming with the letter *dāl*, for example, is completed and followed on the very same page, on fol. 11a, with the section rhyming with *rāʾ* (instead of *dhal*), and, more radically, the end of the *rāʾ* section on fol. 12a is followed, again on that very page, with the *mīm* section (instead of *zāy*, and skipping the intervening twelve letters). Compared to the later versions of the poem, the MS TY 7016 is about a third shorter, containing a total of 397 couplets.

\(^{314}\) These are, in order, alif, bā, tā, thā, ḥā, ḥā, dāl, rā, mīm, and hā.
It is difficult to conclusively establish what this implies about the history of *Dīvān-i Ḥikmet*’s composition. The execution of the manuscript is impeccable, as we have already noted, especially compared to that of the later copies. Had ‘Ināyetullah b. ‘Alī reproduced the text from an “incomplete” copy or was the text itself a work-in-progress that was finalized at a later point? Neither possibility can be definitively ruled out. The next oldest surviving copy of the *Dīvān-i Ḥikmet* offers some valuable insight with respect to this question, but provides no certain answers. The said copy is contained in Vienna MS A.F. 327, the relevant section of which had been completed in 1608-1609 (A.H. 1017), or about a decade after the Istanbul University copy. The Vienna manuscript, which had been executed in Istanbul, contains the full 571 couplets. The copyist of this manuscript was either unaware of the ambiguous authorship panel found in the MS TY 7016 or had consciously chosen to dismiss it. Instead, we encounter a prose introduction and conclusion, both of which are found in almost all later copies of the poem, and, more importantly, the very first appearance of the name Eşrefzāde ‘Alī.

In the prose introduction, the poet presents himself to his audience as ‘Alī, “the author from the city of Iznik” (*‘Alī el-müellif Iznīkî*), whose maternal grandfather is one Sheikh Muḥammed, who was known as the Eşrefzāde (*dohterzāde-i Şeyh Muḥammed eş-şehīr bi’Eşrefzāde*).315 We are subsequently informed that the author had been moved by the disconcerted and miserable (*mütelāşi ve perīşān*) state in which he found even those who appeared to be adepts in the art. Having already perfected his own understanding, ‘Alī İznīkî had decided to compose a poem in alphabetical order (*hurūf-u teḥecci*) to assist the seekers of knowledge with one caveat: like many other alchemist-authors, he had deliberately adopted a style of writing so that his verses would be easy to understand “to the initiated” (*ehline*) and

315 Vienna MS AF 327, fol. 30a.
incomprehensible “to the ignorant” (cāhile).316 The prose conclusion, which cautions the reader against openly displaying the secrets contained in the poem lest the envy of the unworthy and the uninitiated is raised, reveals no further details about the author.317 Whatever the conditions might have been under which the new prose sections were composed, the author-figure they introduced first to the Dīvān-ı hikmet and later to the entire corpus proved to be a problematic one. In the early seventeenth century, no known historical ‘Alī of Iznik quite fits the picture drawn by the new introduction, but over the course of the next hundred years, through both textual modifications and selective readings of this passage, a previously unknown alchemist-author, and one that was indelibly connected to the Eşrefī-Ḳādirī Sufi order, would be found.

The question of how Eşrefzāde ‘Alī transformed into the author of the corpus is intrinsically linked to another one: how did the Dīvān-ı hikmet become a part of the corpus? A plausible answer to this question can be found already in Vienna MS A.F. 327. The very first text with which the Vienna manuscript begins is an anonymous copy of the Durar al-anwār, whose pivotal importance in the emergence of the corpus was explained in the third chapter. That this anonymous work, whose authorship by a Rūmī (i.e. “Anatolian”) author could have easily been deduced from its contents, is followed by a poem written by someone from Iznik must have seemed significant to the manuscript’s early modern audience. In other words, it was the readers of the corpus that had first suspected and then actively built an authorial relationship between the Dīvān-ı hikmet and the rest of the corpus. Indeed, the Dīvān-ı hikmet would continue to make its way into various manuscripts that contained other works from the corpus. Thus, we find it in

316 Ibid., fol. 30a.
317 Ibid., fol. 37b. Note that in the Vienna MS, the prose conclusion was copied on the margins in the middle of the work. Clearly, the conclusion had not been copied along with the rest of the text at first instance (or perhaps it had not been composed). By the time it was to be copied, the marginal space at the end of Dīvān-ı hikmet had been already filled by another work, the Külli hikmet, a work that was occasionally ascribed to Eşrefzāde ‘Alī.
Nuruosmaniye MS 3621, one of only two works copied in that manuscript in October 1693 (Ṣafer 1105), the other being a Turkish translation of the *Sirr ar-rabbanī*, one of the major works from the corpus.318 Yet another Turkish translation, that of the short *Durrat al-bayḍā fi ṣināʿat al-yākūtat al-ḥamrā* had been copied in 1661/1662 (1072), immediately preceding the same poem in Süleymaniye MS Karaçelebizade 359. These two relatively early examples can be greatly expanded by the manuscript evidence from the eighteenth century, but for now it will suffice to point out the existence of several short extracts from various works in the corpus, ascribed simply to “the new author,” along with the *Dīvān-i hikmet*, in Atatürk MS Muallim Cevdet Yz 180, which had been copied in 1659/1660 (1070). While we find no explicit authorial connection made between the poem and the prose works of the corpus by the copyists of these manuscripts, their frequently observed co-existence must have made an impression of the minds of the readers. The more likely reason, however, for the copyists’ coupling of the *Dīvān-i hikmet* with these and a number of other alchemical works in prose is that the poem succinctly stated, and in a much more memorable fashion, the core of the alchemical knowledge contained in the latter.

The evolution of the presumed author of the *Dīvān-i hikmet* into the author of the entire corpus was merely the first in the centuries-long interaction of the readers with the texts that constituted the corpus. Whether or not this figure had truly been responsible for all or part of the works constituting the corpus is beside the point. What is important is that from the seventeenth century onward, many Ottoman readers of the corpus increasingly identified the “new author” as Eşrefzâde ‘Alî. I contend that this identification was greatly facilitated by not just the

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318 The copyist of this particular manuscript was one Sheikh Aḥmed el-Ḵādirī, also known as Eflāṭūn (Plato) Dede. Sheikh Aḥmed was certainly one among many other nameless copyists and readers of the corpus who walked the Ḫādirī path.
serendipitous meeting of the Dīvān-ı hikmet with alchemical works from the corpus in numerous manuscripts, but more significantly through the prestige of the Eşrefzâde family and of the Eşrefî order of dervishes. It was assumed, right from the beginning, that Eşrefzâde ‘Alî was a member of this family and order, and thus a descendant of Eşrefzâde ‘Abdullâh Rûmî, one of the greatest Turkish mystics of the fifteenth century.

We have already noted in the second chapter that the mastery of alchemy, broadly defined as the ability to transform both the material and the spiritual nature of things, was considered among the sure signs of sainthood. Since such esoteric knowledge was expected to pass from the sheikh to his spiritual successors (in many cases, the sheikh’s offspring), it is not difficult to appreciate the significance of Eşrefzâde ‘Alî’s presumed relationship with a saint of ‘Abdullâh Rûmî’s stature. The Eşrefî order, moreover, was more than just its founder. In the seventeenth century, when the corpus was being read, copied, and commented upon, it commanded a humble but highly visible following in the heartland of the Ottoman world, and the pious hymns composed by its sheikhs inspired members of even other Sufî orders. The association of the corpus with an Eşrefzâde allowed its readership to anchor these alchemical writings within a social group with which they were immediately and intimately familiar. It was not any indisputable evidence gleaned from these works themselves, but rather the collective imagination of some of their readers that linked them to the Ottoman Turks’ mystical heritage. While the exact identity of Eşrefzâde ‘Alî was, as we will discuss below, defined and re-defined over the course of the centuries by the readers, his kinship with ‘Abdullâh Rûmî, being the central facet of that shifting identity, always remained a constant.
Eşrefzade ‘Abdullah Rūmī

The flat riverbanks, marshy lakeshores, forested hills, and steep mountain ranges of what had been the Ḥūdāvendigār province of Ottoman Anatolia are to this day dotted with innumerable shrines of Muslim holy men. This densely populated spiritual landscape owes its existence as much to the waves of wandering mystics who had entered the region on the heels of the Mongol invasions, and the generations who followed their lead, as to its syncretic inheritance of the monasteries and hermits of Byzantine Bithynia. After all, the great Uludağ Mountain, the Bithynian Olympos that overlooks Bursa and dominates the plains around it, was known as Keşiş Dağı (Monk Mountain) right up to the twentieth century.319 Most of these tombs and shrines have left behind just a name, the sole memory of the holy men kept alive by locals making offerings and bringing their children for blessings.

We know scarcely more about the historical Eşrefzade ‘Abdullah Rūmī than the other early saintly figures of Ḥūdāvendigār. The standard narrative of his life, the seventeenth-century Menākıb-ı Eşrefzāde is a problematic source given its relatively late date of composition, the even later dates of its first extant copies, and above all its legendary contents consisting primarily of miracles.320 We can confidently state, however, that the sheikh had been active in and around

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319 The name change had taken place in the early years of the Republican regime in 1925, with the efforts of the Geographic Society of Bursa. The renaming was part of a larger and nation-wide efforts to replace the Christian (and non-Turkish) toponyms that would only accelerate as the twentieth century progressed. For the significance of the monastic establishments on Bithynian Olympos, especially before the rise of Mount Athos to prominence, for Byzantine religious life and politics, see Michael Angold, *Church and society in Byzantium under the Comneni, 1081-1261* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 266-67.

320 *Menākıb-ı Eşrefzāde*, along with a number of other sources, is at the center of a scholarly debate on the historical ‘Abdullah Rūmī. More specifically, there are discrepancies between the earliest known account for Eşrefzāde provided by Taşköprüzade’s *Shaqā’iq* on the one hand and the common narrative found in the near contemporary *Menākıb-ı Eşrefzāde* and *Ravzâ-i Evliyâ*, the biographical dictionary of Baldırzāde, on the other. While Ottoman sources had notably mixed and matched these two seemingly distinct accounts, the Turkish historian Orhan Köprüлю was the first to suggest that they were in fact describing two distinct individuals. See “Tarihi Kaynak Olarak XIV. ve XV. Asırlardaki Bazı Türk Menakıbnameleri” (PhD Dissertation, İstanbul Üniversitesi, 1955), 106-10. In yet another PhD dissertation, Willam Crosby Hickman has argued that the two accounts are not irreconcilable, pointing
the city of Iznik during the middle of the fifteenth century, and that he had probably not lived to see the sixteenth. In his surviving prose works, he refers to himself as ‘Abdullāh ibn Muḥammed el-Miṣrī er-Rūmī el-Ḳādirī (‘Abdullāh the son of Muḥammed, the Egyptian, the Anatolian, the Ḭādirī) and, in one instance, more simply as ‘Abdullāh ibn Eṣref. In his poetry, he invariably uses the pen-name Eṣrefoğlu Rūmī. Based on these, and perhaps also on oral stories circulating among members of the Eṣrefiyye, a more elaborate family history was reconstructed or retold in the subsequent centuries: ‘Abdullāh’s father Eṣref was the son of an Egyptian religious scholar named Muḥammed. The family had arrived in Anatolia during the earliest years of the nascent Ottoman emirate, and had settled in the newly conquered city of Iznik, but not before ‘Abdullāh’s two brothers, each named Muḥammed, established themselves separately at Hama in Syria and Manisa in Ṣāruḫān.321 ‘Abdullāh Rūmī’s own testimony, on the other hand, only reveals that his father was named Muḥammed Eṣref and that the family had some (distant?) connection to Egypt.

Most other biographical details relating to him must be considered uncertain at best. These have been preserved by Eṣreفزade’s descendants and their followers, who had a vested

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321 The ultimate source of the account of the family’s journey from Egypt to Anatolia is an oral one narrated by Safiyuddin Efendi, the sheikh of the order’s Numaniyye lodge in Bursa to Asaf Halet Çelebi, who edited and published the Divan of ‘Abdullāh Rūmī in the first half of the twentieth century, which was the second effort to publish the entire text. See Eṣrefoğlu Divanı, ed. Asaf Halet Çelebi (İstanbul: Ahmet Halit Kitabevi, 1944), p. 6. This account has been repeated, and to some degree discussed, by almost all later studies. See for example Adalet Çakır, “Mehmet Rıf’at Efendi’nin Neḥhati ‘r-Riyāzi ‘l-ʿÅliye Adlı Eserinin Işığında Anadolu’dan Kādirilik” (PhD Dissertation, Marmara Üniversitesi, 2006), p. 336. The oral evidence preserved by Asaf Halet Çelebi either informed, or stemmed from, an anonymous family tree that was in the possession of Ziya Eṣrefoğlu, who showed it to William Crosby Hickman in the late 1960s. According to Hickman, who was in the process of preparing the Divan’s definitive edition, the family tree was a late Ottoman document, perhaps even from the turn of the twentieth century—yet, we should note, that it is not impossible that it had been reproduced based on an earlier copy. See Hickman, “Eṣrefoğlu Rūmī: Fifteenth century Anatolian Mystic Poet,” p. 34.
interest in keeping the memory of (or actively creating) the saint’s legendary feats. Eşrefzâde has also left behind a large collection of mystic poems and hymns, as well as at least two prose works that allow us to comment on his intellectual and spiritual world view. It was the former group of writings in verse, that is Eşrefzâde’s Dīvān and hymns (ilâhîs), which were responsible for the saint’s great fame beyond the Eşrefîs: when the celebrated seventeenth-century Ottoman traveler Evliyâ Çelebî visited the main Gülşenî lodge of Cairo, ‘Abdullâh Rûmî’s hymns were among the pious songs chanted by the dervishes there.\textsuperscript{322} The Dīvān, for its part, has frequently been compared to the mystical verses composed by the quasi-legendary Yûnus Emre, who appears to have had a profound influence on ‘Abdullâh Rûmî’s poetry. The two men, separated by a gulf of almost hundred years, were among the spiritual pioneers of Muslim Anatolia who introduced the ecstatic Sufi poetry of the greater Iranian world to a Turkish-speaking audience.\textsuperscript{323} 

Poetry would remain as the strong suit of the Eşrefî order for generations to come—‘Abdurraḥmân Tırsî, Eşrefzâde’s son-in-law and successor, Tırsî’s son Sheikh Ḥamdî, and grandson Sîr ‘Alî Sultan, just to name three, had all left behind mystical poems that continued to be popular within the Eşrefî order, as well as among other Sufi tarîkats and the lay population at large.\textsuperscript{324} Eşrefî sheikhs’ fame as master poets must have had played a crucial role in the gradual acceptance of the Dīvān-ı hikmet as a part of the large body of verses produced by members of the order.

What allows us to chronologically situate ‘Abdullâh Rûmî is not his poetry, or the frequently cited but ultimately unverifiable death date of 874/1469-70, but a passage in his most

\textsuperscript{322} Seyâhatnâme, vol. 10, p. 242.
\textsuperscript{323} On Yûnus Emre’s influence on the poetry of ‘Abdullâh Rûmî, see Köprülü, Early Mystics in Turkish Literature, p. 365.
\textsuperscript{324} Only some remnants of these divans, however, have survived to the present. See for example Menâkıb-ı Eşrefzâde, pp. 28-9, for a poem written by ‘Abdurraḥim Tırsî, apparently on the occasion of ‘Abdullâh Rûmî’s death.
famous prose work, the *Müzekkî’n-nūfūs* (“The Purifier of Souls”), which states that it had been completed in the month of Ramazan 852/November 1448.\(^{325}\) The *Müzekkî’n-nūfūs*, a collection of Sufi teachings and the mystical interpretation of Islamic tenets, is a treasure trove of information for the spiritual world of Eşrefzâde: therein we find large number of quotations from, and stories relating to, the Sufi masters of the previous ages, from Bayezid Bistâmî to Junayd Baghdadî, and from Jalâladdîn Rûmî to the *shaikh al-akbar* Ibn ‘Arabî. Most noteworthy, however, are those concerning ‘Abdulqâdir Gîlânî, upon whom Eşrefzâde generously lavishes praises and pronounces that no “true saint” (*hâkîkî velî*) has come to the world after his time. The relationship between Eşrefzâde and ‘Abdulqâdir Gîlânî had been initiated by the former’s discipleship under the latter’s “great, great, great grandson,” Sheikh Hussayn, one of the only four “perfect sheikhs” (*şeyh-i kâmil*), out of a staggering seventeen in whom Eşrefzâde had sought spiritual guidance.\(^{326}\) The friends of God, however, as we are repeatedly told, are to be considered among the living—like other followers of ‘Abdulqâdir Gîlânî, Eşrefzâde was steered in the right direction on his mystical quest by the eponymous founder of the Kâdiriyye.\(^{327}\) The special place in the *Müzekkî’n-nūfūs* reserved for ‘Abdulqâdir Gîlânî, from whom the Kâdiri path derives its spiritual lineage, and the fact that he calls himself el-Kâdirî establishes beyond any doubt that the Eşrefiyye’s Kâdiri association had indeed begun with ‘Abdullâh Rûmî.\(^{328}\) This

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\(^{326}\) *Müzekkî’n-nūfūs*, p. 383.

\(^{327}\) The special relationship between ‘Abdulkâdir Gîlânî and his followers is described in these words by ‘Abdullâh Rûmî: “[Gîlânî’s] lineage continues and his behavior, path, guidance, and disposal are still present in this world. His successors are in Anatolia, Iran, Syria, Arabia, and India…allowing seekers to meet with his soul as if he is still among the living.” See *Müzekkî’n-nūfūs*, p. 392. Similar sentiments are echoed in the following verses from a poem composed by ‘Abdurrahîm Tırsî, the son-in-law and successor of ‘Abdullâh Rûmî: “Evliyalar ölmez imiş, can acıçası görmez imiş, aşıkların komaz imiş, Eşrefoğlu Rumi Sultan.” (“It is said that the friends of God do not die, or feel bodily pain, they do not forsake their lovers, O Eşrefoğlu Rumi Sultan.”). The full poem is recorded in *Menâkıb-i Eşrefzâde*, p. 28.

\(^{328}\) Further evidence is provided by ‘Abdullâh Rûmî’s poetry, which has numerous references to ‘Abdulkâdir Gîlânî. It is of course open to debate to what extent the Kâdirî path followed and understood by ‘Abdullâh Rûmî resembled
association was extended, as one would expect, to Eşrefzade ‘Alī himself, who was frequently bestowed the epithet el-Ḳādirī by the copyists of the corpus. At least one such copyist, a certain Sheikh Aḥmed, who had been active in the late seventeenth century, was also a Ḳādirī, and had reproduced the Dīvān-i hikmet and the Turkish translation of the Sirr ar-rabbānī in a single volume. While firmer evidence is lacking, we can speculate that these and other works from the corpus had been circulating among Ḳādirī circles, whose scholarly activities must have strengthened (if not precipitated) the relationship between the corpus and Eşrefzade ‘Alī.

The same circles were also partly responsible for creating an image of ‘Abdullāh Rūmī that was the model sheikh, one whose spiritual authority was matched by his exoteric-legalistic knowledge. The image itself was not baseless, as ‘Abdullāh Rūmī’s early career as a religious scholar is mentioned by some of the earliest biographical notes and supported by evidence from his own writings. Some steps were taken, however, to further strengthen the clues from such sources. A fascinating and previously unknown mystical tract apocryphally attributed to the sheikh had clearly been produced by his followers to lend credence to his mastery over both the exoteric and esoteric facets of religion. In a late seventeenth-century manuscript containing primarily Celvetī texts, two short works that form a unit are found. Curiously entitled the fermān (decree) and hüccet (legal deed) of Eşrefoğlu Rūmî respectively, both “documents” are in fact allegorical Sufi treatises in nature. Stylistically identical, the contents of both works depict a court case in which a man named Rūḥ (“The Soul”), a resident of the city of Vücūd (“The

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329 In the Risāle-i Hacer-i Esrār (“The Treatise on the Stone of Secrets”) found in Süleymaniye MS Hacı Mahmud Efendi 3666, fols. 41-48, for example, he is referred to as Sheikh ‘Alī el-Ḳādirī el-Şerefī.

330 The common trope of the mystic attaining first exoteric and then esoteric religious knowledge is not necessarily apologetic on the part of the Sufis; biographical dictionaries of the period are full of religious scholars renouncing the entrapments of the ‘ilmīyye system, its hierarchical teaching positions and judgeships, to initiate their spiritual journey.

331 The two pseudo-documents are found copied back to back in Samsun MS 247.
Body”) seeks justice from Eşrefoğlu Rūmī because he had been harassed by the city’s subaşı (“commander of police”) by the name of Iblīs (“Devil”). These pseudo-documents closely resemble the format of actual shari’a court records, to the extent that we find, attached to the final section, a list of witnesses such as ‘Irifiant ibn Imān (“Wisdom the son of Faith”), “teacher at the school of the Qur’an” and Hibbetullah, “the judge of the city of Body.”

The allegorical treatment of Sufi teachings is of course part and parcel of Islamic mystical literature, from the epic quest of the birds for finding Simurg in Farīduddīn ‘Aṭṭār’s Mantuq at-ṭayr to the tragic love story of Layla and Majnūn, but the use of a court record format for conveying these ideas is unprecedented. What had been hinted by the writings of ‘Abdullāh Rūmī himself, that his religious knowledge did not consist solely of the esoterical, had been more conclusively established by an early modern hand, very possibly an Eşrefi himself, long after the sheikh’s death. The perfection of ‘Abdullāh Rūmī’s learning and wisdom was not tangential for the readers of the müellif-i cedid corpus: later tradition held that Eşrefzâde ‘Alî had received his early education from ‘Abdullāh Rūmī himself.\(^332\)

That Eşrefzâde ‘Alî was related to ‘Abdullāh Rūmī by blood was all the more significant as the latter figure was recognized, at some point in the late sixteenth century the latest, as a descendant of the Prophet Muḥammad and ‘Alî. Both the Menākıb-i Eşrefzâde and Baldırzâde’s (d. 1060/1650) Ravzâ-i Evliyâ (“The Garden of Saints”), the two earliest narratives of the saint’s life, assert that ‘Abdullāh Rūmī was a sayyid, being a descendant of the Prophet and his son-in-law through Husayn, the third imam.\(^333\) The two texts are in agreement that ‘Abdullāh Rūmī had chosen to hide his prophetic heritage by secretly carrying the green turban (dülbent) inside his

\(^{332}\) For example a marginal note for the Hadiyyat al-bahiyya, an alchemical commentary found in Manisa MS HK 2967, fol. 143b.

\(^{333}\) References from this work are from its most recent edition. Baldızâde Selîsî Şeyh Mehmed, Ravza-i Evliya, eds. Mefail Hızlı and Murat Yurtsever (Bursa: Arasta, 2000).
clothing (*kisve*).\(^{334}\) This tradition appears to conveniently circumvent the fact that no one had witnessed the saint bear a symbol of his alleged lineage during his lifetime and strongly indicates that his sayyid-hood had been claimed posthumously by his followers. ‘Abdullāh Rūmī’s belonging to the *ahl al-bayt*, the Prophet’s household, without a doubt bolsters the abovementioned vision of him as an authoritative figure of both the exoteric and esoteric religious knowledge, as the former is frequently associated with the Prophet and the latter with ‘Alī.

These invented traditions (i.e. that ‘Abdullāh Rūmī was a *sayyid* and that he had perfect religious knowledge) compliment another, less well known aspect of how the saint was known among the dabblers in alchemy and other esoteric sciences: ‘Abdullāh Rūmī was supposedly the author of a widely circulating commentary on a well-known alchemical poem in Turkish, the aforementioned *Kāšide-i Sīr-i Ṭā-Hā*. This commentary, which was arguably more popular than the poem itself, will be treated in greater detail in the following chapter. It should also be pointed out that a number of works from the corpus were also commonly, and mistakenly, attributed to ‘Abdullāh Rūmī by early modern copyists, a case of misidentification arising from the fact that he and Eşrefzāde ‘Alī shared the same family name.\(^{335}\) All of this rendered the ‘Abdullāh Rūmī who was known to the learned Ottomans of the seventeenth century a fitting ancestor for the author of the corpus, and there is evidence suggesting that the readers of the corpus were not shy

\(^{334}\) *Menākıb-i Eşrefzāde*, p. 3 and Baldırzāde, pp. 274-75. In the former narrative, the object is described merely as a “sign of seyyidhood” while in the latter, the green turban is explicitly stated. This might be another evidence that Baldırzāde’s account is derivative of the *Menākıb* and not vice versa.

\(^{335}\) This misidentification carried over to modern studies as well, see for example Ekmeleddin İhsanoğlu, “The Ottoman Scientific-Scholarly Literature” in Ekmeleddin İhsanoğlu ed., *History of the Ottoman State, Society and Civilization*, vol. 2 (Istanbul: IRCICA, 2002), pp. 539-40, where some of the alchemical treatises from the corpus that had been in some manuscript copies incorrectly ascribed to Eşrefzāde ‘Abdullāh Rūmī are enumerated among the scientific writings of the fifteenth century.
of reimagining the author so as to draw them closer together.\textsuperscript{336} The interaction between the two figures, separated as they were by over a hundred years, was made possible by both the Eşrefî order’s relative obscurity in the sixteenth century and the willingness of the corpus’ readership to more decisively associate Eşrefzâde ‘Alî with the fifteenth-century mystic to the point of altering the former’s malleable identity.

\textit{The Eşrefiyye}

We have surprisingly little information about the decades following ‘Abdullâh Rûmî’s passing, that is, the order’s history in the early sixteenth century.\textsuperscript{337} Curiously, even the travelers who passed through İznik in this period make no mention of the order’s āsitâne. This is not to suggest that the Eşrefiyye did not have a presence in the city—we actually do know that the followers of the saint regularly visited his tomb, thanks to a porcelain lamp dating from 1549 that refers to it.\textsuperscript{338} What is almost certain is that the site was of mere local importance through much of the sixteenth century, and its fame greatly spread in the next one through developments about

\textsuperscript{336} See below, pp. 188-89.
\textsuperscript{337} Mehmed Şemseddin, the author of the aforementioned \textit{Yâdigâr-ı Şemsî}, relates that he had seen an endowment document (\textit{vakfiyye}) dating to 890/1485 in which the Eşrefî compound is mentioned. The benefactor of the site, according to this document, was Mükerrrem Sultan, the mother of Bayezid II. See \textit{Yâdigâr-ı Şemsî}, 88. For a brief discussion of this otherwise unknown \textit{vakfiyye} based on Mehmed Şemseddin’s account, see Adalet Çakır, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 353.
\textsuperscript{338} While the lamp had been made in İznik, it was intended for use in Jerusalem, whose monuments had received much imperial generosity under Sultan Süleiman I. The decorator of the lamp, who identifies himself as a dervish, was very likely to be an Eşrefî himself. John Carswell, \textit{Iznik Pottery} (London: British Museum Press, 2006), 65-67. Less conclusive is evidence found in the \textit{Menâkıb-ı Hz. Üftade}, which records the deeds of the sixteenth century mystic Sheikh Üftade, the master and teacher of the famous Celveti sheikh Mahmud Hüdayî. Therein we find a number of references to ‘Abdullâh Rûmî, including a miracle that takes place in the Eşrefî āsitâne in İznik. The \textit{Menâkıb}, however, is of uncertain age, its earliest manuscript copies dating from much later periods. For the aforementioned miracle, see \textit{Menakib-ı Üfüda}, eds. Muhammed Safi and Abdurrahman Yûnul (Bursa: Celvet Yayınları, 1996), p. 95.
which we can only speculate. This helps to explain the utter silence of the fifteenth century
sources on the order’s founder, whose reputation had easily escaped the notice of contemporary
chroniclers. On the other hand, the establishment of several branches of the Eşrefiyye in Bursa
starting in the late sixteenth century must have greatly increased the visibility of the order by
magnifying its profile through that city’s influential intellectual and cultural climate.339

When Evliyā Çelebī passed through the city of Iznik in 1648-1649 (A.H. 1058), the
āsitāne of the Eşrefī order was the first among the many dervish lodges and saints’ tombs he
visited.340 The site was no stranger to more illustrious guests either, no offence to Evliyā Çelebī
intended: a decade prior, Murād IV had richly endowed the complex after having personally met
and conversed with the order’s reigning sheikh.341 There is no doubt that by the early seventeenth
century, the Eşrefiyye commanded a great level of respect from the high and the low and that it
had amassed a considerable amount of spiritual capital, neither of which was commensurate with
its geographical reach. To be sure, the Eşrefī order was not among the most widespread Sufi
brotherhoods of the early modern Islamic world. Regardless of ‘Abdullah Rūmī’s early
association with Bayrām Velī, the founder of the Bayrāmīyye, in the early seventeenth century
his order was accepted as a sub-branch of the Kādiriyye, which was itself somewhat

339 Interestingly, the Menâkıb-i Üftâde suggests the existence of some rivalry between the Eşrefis and the followers
of Sheikh Üftâde. In one case, Sheikh Şa'bân, the famous Ḫalveti mystic, is told in a dream to seek spiritual
guidance—rather poignantly, he first goes to Iznik to consult the Eşrefi elders, where he sees the same dream yet
again. He then goes to Bursa, where he would meet Sheikh Üftâde and find what he had been instructed to look for.
In another, Üftâde’s disciples tell him about the promise made by Eşreząde Rūmî (by then long deceased) that
whoever does any charitable deed at his tomb would benefit from his intercession at the Day of Judgement, upon
which Üftâde pronounces that he would intercede for whoever benefits the people of Bursa by doing as little as
bringing firewood to sell in its markets. See Menâkıb-i Üftâde, pp. 81-82 and 107.
341 Murād IV’s visit is attested by a number of sources, including Evliya himself and the hagiography of ‘Abdullah
Rumi, which includes episodes from the lives of his descendents and successors. See Ibid., vol. 3, p. 10 and Menâkıb-
i Eşrefzâde, p. 50. With respect to the date of Murād IV’s visit, the latter source only provides an inexact time
period, “when the...Sultan was on the campaign of two Iraqs” (‘Irākeyn seferine giderken), which could be any time
between 1634 and 1638. Fortunately Evliyā Çelebi has preserved the inscription of the new construction funded by
Murād IV, which bears the date 1043 (1633-34). Since the Revan/Yerevan siege, which concluded with a victory in
1635, was the first time the Sultan had personally led the army in the Ottoman-Safavid wars of his reign, the visit to
Iznik must have taken place in 1634.

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underrepresented within the Turkish-speaking parts of the Ottoman Empire. Unlike many other sub-branches of the greater Sufi *tarīkas* originating from Anatolia or Istanbul, the Eşrefī order had benefited little from Ottoman territorial expansion in terms of its geographic extent. Compared to some of these other distinctively “Rūmī” orders, such as the Celvetiyye, which quickly established itself in the Balkans after having been organized by ‘Azīz Maḥmūd Ḥūdāyī in the capital, the Eşrefiyye appears to be a highly localized phenomenon: the great majority of its dervish lodges were concentrated in the Ḥūdāvendigār province, corresponding roughly to Byzantine Bithynia, the birthplace of the Ottoman state in the northwestern corner of Anatolia. The Eşrefiyye was better known for the miracles performed by its founder and the beautiful simplicity of its sheikhs’ poetry than its missionary zeal. In terms of its core beliefs, the order was indistinguishable from the other branches of the Ḳādirīyye, and indeed from most other Sufi orders of the late medieval and early modern Islamic world—the religious services, whose exact contents did vary from one order to the order, included litanies, the regular reading of certain portions of the Qur’ān (*wird*), and the *dhikr* or “remembrance [of God]” ceremonies, which were performed vocally (as opposed to silently, as was the case in some orders such as the

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342 The Ottomans had restored the tomb of ‘Abdulqādir Gīlānī in 1535 upon their conquest of Baghdad in 1535, one of the many such imperial projects to project Ottoman state power over the sacred geography of Iraq, which also included the tomb Imam Ḥanafi. The Ḳādirīyye was particularly influential among the Kurdish tribes of northern Mesopotamia. Until the missionary activities of ‘Ismāīl Rūmī of Tosya (d. 1631), however, the Ḳādirī order was remarkably not represented in the capital city of Istanbul or the Balkans. The Eşrefiyye can therefore be considered as a very early Ḳādirī substratum upon which ‘Ismāīl Rūmī’s efforts were based. It is noteworthy that both Eşrefzāde ‘Abdullāh and ‘Ismail Rūmī are known as the *pir-i sânî* (“the second founder”) of the Ḳādirīyye in Ottoman sources, with the latter figure arguably more deserving of this honorary epithet. At least one Eşrefi sheikh, ‘Īzzeddīn ibn Eşref-i Sānî (d. 1153/1740-41), was buried at the main lodge established by ‘Ismāīl Rūmī in the Tophane district of Istanbul. See *Menāḳib-i Eşrefzāde*, p. 56. On the Rūmiyye in Istanbul and the Balkans, see Metin İzeti, *Balkanlar’da Tasavvuf* (İstanbul: Gelenek, 2004), p. 193. For general information on the Ḳādirī order see,, *EI2*, s.v. “Ḳādiriyya.”

343 On the expansion of the Celvetiyye, see Yılmaz, *Aziz Mahmud Hüdayi ve Celvetiyye Tarikatı*, pp. 231-43.
Naḳşbendiyye). What set apart Eşrefī dervishes above all were their distinctive clothing, and more particularly their skullcaps on which the figure of a rose was sewn.\textsuperscript{344}

The order had been established amidst a historical fog, in circumstances that would only be retold in the hagiographic material devoted to its founder. The Eşrefīyye had sprung from the once-bustling town of Iznik, whose fortunes had been declining since the early fourteenth-century Ottoman conquest of Bursa and the rise of the latter city to dominance with respect to the preferred trade routes leading to Byzantine Constantinople.\textsuperscript{345} By the eighteenth century, a number of satellite Eşrefī lodges could be found in Pazarköy (presently Orhaneli), Lefke (presently Osmaneli), Küçük Kumla near Gemlik, and, above all in Bursa, which was home to at least three lodges that wielded the greatest influence within the order if its āsitāne in Iznik is excepted.\textsuperscript{346} Situating these foundations on a map reveals an interesting pattern about the expansion of the order following its inception: all of the aforementioned hamlets and cities are within close geographic proximity of Lake Iznik, and therefore of the city of Iznik itself, which is on the eastern shores of the lake. Lefke, which lies about 35 kilometers to the east on the banks of the River Sakarya, Pazarköy on the western shores of the lake, Küçük Kumla, which is a

\textsuperscript{344} This was known as the “Eşrefī rose,” a variant of the rose figure used by Kādirīs in general. See Mustafa Kara, \textit{Eşrefoğlu Rumi} (Ankara: Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı, 1995), pp. 87-88.

\textsuperscript{345} The primacy of Bursa over Iznik had been established by the fourteenth century, particularly with the former city acting as the capital of the Ottoman Empire until the time of Murād I (r. 1361-89), and as the site of primary imperial patronage in Asia long after the removal of the capital to Edirne. It must nonetheless be pointed out that Iznik remained as a center of learning and production, especially the famous Iznik tiles, until the seventeenth century, when the town was reduced to a rather unimportant provincial hamlet. It has been fashionable to link Iznik’s declining economic power and that of its educational institutions to the supposed decline of the Ottoman Empire in the same period. See for example Semavi Eyice, \textit{İznik: Tarihiçe ve Eski Eserleri} (İstanbul: Sanat Tarihi Araştırmaları Dergisi Yayını, 1988), pp. 69-70. It is difficult to accept such a verdict, however, considering the meteoric rise of cities elsewhere in the Empire, such as Izmir and Aleppo, in exactly the same time period. The emergence of Kütahya in western Anatolia as a rival center of the ceramics industry that surpassed Iznik in the seventeenth century also contradicts the notion that the economic and demographic decline of Iznik followed a supposed decline of the Ottoman Empire.

\textsuperscript{346} The \textit{Menākıb-i Eşrefzāde} itself is an excellent source for the interaction of Eşrefī mystics and the larger community of Bursa and the latter’s city relative size and importance compared to the other cities in which the order was active must have been the decisive factor in Bursa’s supremacy. It is not difficult to imagine that the order’s headquarters would have relocated to Bursa around the turn of the eighteenth century, had it not been for the presence of the tomb of ʿAbdullāh Rūmī in Iznik.
coastal town on the Marmara Sea, but a short 20 kilometers away from Lake İznil, and finally Bursa, 50 kilometers to the southwest. The order’s humble expansion had not taken it to other parts of Anatolia, let alone the Balkans or the Arab provinces, and until more modern times, it had no presence even in the imperial capital. In short, we are apparently faced with an order that remained extremely close to its birthplace.

As it turns out, however, appearances can be deceptive, and in this case they call for a minor revision to what has been told so far about the order. Much of the secondary literature on the history of the Eşrefiyye after its founder’s death depends on a single seventeenth-century source, the aforementioned *Menāḳib-i Eşreffāde* (“The Deeds of Eşreffāde”). The *Menāḳib* had been written by one of the disciples of Sheikh Ḥamdī, Ṭabullāh Rūmī’s grandson, around the middle of the seventeenth century, but its oldest manuscript copies date from the nineteenth century and hence contain considerable amount of later additions. It is primarily from these additions that we are informed about the various lodges established by the Eşreffis in the second half of the seventeenth and throughout the eighteenth centuries. A closer inspection of the *Menāḳib* reveals that, in all cases, the dervish lodges cited above were founded not just by members of the Eşreffī order, but by members of the Eşreffāde family, that is the direct descendants of Ṭabullāh Rūmī. It is, of course, hardly remarkable that the order was led by descendants of its founder—this was in fact all but expected. In this case, however, we witness male members of the Eşreffāde family in charge of almost all the known lodges, which is rather

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347 See *Menāḳib-i Eşreffāde*, pp. 52-53.
348 This disciple is Ṭabullāh Veliyüddīn, who provides his name in the introduction of the *Menāḳib-i Eşreffāde*, 1-2. We know little about him beyond the fact that he was from Bursa and that he was a preacher at the Emir Sultan (Buḥārī) Mosque in Bursa.
unusual. At least this is the picture that emerges from the *Menākıb-i Eşrefzāde*. Fortunately there are other, underutilized, sources on the order that can afford us a clearer one.

The Prime Ministerial State Archives in Istanbul are home to a number of documents that are indispensable for both verifying and complicating the information found in the *Menākıb*. Two documents in particular conclusively show the existence of an otherwise unknown Eşrefī lodge in Nif (ancient Nymphaion, presently Kemalpaşa) to the east of Izmir, and well outside the boundaries of the Ḥûdâvendîgâr province. The lodge was in existence in 1752, but it had obviously been founded at an earlier date. Three documents dating to 1676, 1698, and 1713, in turn, mention a mosque named after Eşrefzāde in the nearby town of Tire, in the province of Aydın. This mosque has not survived to the present, but it is likely that it too was a tekke-mosque: one of the few instances in which an Eşrefī sheikh who seems to be unrelated to the Eşrefzāde family is mentioned in the *Menākıb* concerns the leader (*seccāde-nişîn*) of the Eşrefī dervishes at Tire. The previously unknown lodge at Nif saves the one at Tire, whose existence is attested both by the *Menākıb* and state documents, from being a geographic anomaly. The Eşrefiyye must have experienced a modest expansion southwards, into the Şûrûhîn and Aydın provinces in western Anatolia starting in the last quarter of the seventeenth century at the latest. Evidence from the Prime Ministerial State Archives also shows that the order’s endowments were not limited to lands that were close to its powerbase around Lake Iznik. One such document points to villages near Safranbolu, in north central Anatolia, whose revenues had been allocated to the Eşrefî sheikhs. Finally, perhaps a more interesting source for our purposes is the travelogue of the aforementioned Evliyā Çelebî, who, in addition to listing the Eşrefzāde Mosque

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349 The only exception is the unnamed *dede* (elder, sheikh) of Tire in the 28th miracle, which is a very late addition to, and indeed the final miracle to be recorded in, our text.
350 See Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi (hereafter BOA), Cevdet Evkaf 661/33352 and 109/5412.
352 For the revenues allocated from Safranbolu, see BOA, Cevdet Evkaf 280/14293.
among the religious buildings of Tire, mentions a certain Sheikh Sübhān in Gemlik as one of the successors (ḫulefā) of Eşrefzāde.\textsuperscript{353} In Gemlik, we are once again back to a location that is just a day’s journey away from Lake Iznik. Nonetheless, Sheikh Subhān joins less than a handful of Eşrefī sheikhs mentioned in the *Menākıbnāme* who wielded the spiritual authority of ‘Abdullāh Rūmī without being one of his direct descendants. To him we can add a certain Meḥmed Efendī, originally from Berat in Albania, who also settled in Gemlik after having been initiated into the order in Iznik according to Evliyā.\textsuperscript{354}

While none of these sources warrant a radical alteration of the two points we have made above—namely that the Eşrefīyye had not ventured far from its place of birth in Iznik and that the order’s satellite foundations elsewhere remained for the most part under the control of ‘Abdullāh Rūmī’s descendants—they do display the potential pitfalls of relying on a single source for the history of the Eşrefī ṭarīqa. This history was as elusive to the seventeenth century Ottomans as it is to us, with the legendary and the historical freely mixing in the oral tradition until the latter was partially written down in the first half of the seventeenth century. It is certain that not much more information was available to the readers of our corpus, whether they were Eşrefīs or not, with respect to the order’s founder and his immediate successors. The murkiness of their knowledge, in turn, enabled the same readers to fashion new identities for Eşrefzāde ‘Alī, ones that were more intimately linked to ‘Abdullāh Rūmī.

\textsuperscript{353} *Seyāhatnāme*, vol. 5, p. 145.  
\textsuperscript{354} Ibid., vol. 5, p. 195.
The patchy history of the Eşrefzāde family outlined so far is sufficient to make one issue clear: we know surprisingly little about its affairs in the sixteenth-century, and not enough to be able to distinguish the legendary from the historical in the fifteenth. Sheikh Muḥammed, the grandfather of ‘Alī of Iznik mentioned in the prose introduction of the Divān-ı Ḵikmet’s Vienna copy, as well as in most later copies, could therefore well be a member of the family whose name has not survived in other sources. This, however, is not the entire story.

Through the seventeenth century the identity of Eşrefzāde ‘Alī was to be elaborated upon and then ironed out by successive generations of editors and copyists. It is true that we are at a loss as to who exactly Sheikh Muḥammed was, or whether he was even a member of the Eşrefzāde family. The fact that his grandson hailed from Iznik reinforces but does not ascertain this possibility. Yet for the Divān-ı Ḵikmet’s Ottoman readers, the connection was clear, if problematic—much like the modern historian, they appear to have been at best uncertain with regards to the place Sheikh Muḥammed occupies in this work and unable to situate him conclusively within the history of the famous family of mystics. One outcome of this was a tendency to “correct” the passage in the prose introduction of the poem so that a better known individual replaced Sheikh Muḥammed. Thus we have Istanbul University MS TY 9320, in which the copyist took the matters in his own hand by changing the name of ‘Alī’s maternal grandfather from Eşrefzāde Muḥammed to Eşrefzāde ‘Abdullāh, thereby making the author a direct descendant of the founder of the Eşrefī order.355 This was perhaps a natural development, as many copies of the poem were simply entitled “the son of Eşrefzāde’s daughter”

355 Istanbul University MS TY 9320, fol. 28a.
(dokhterzade-i Eşrefzade), and “Eşrefzade” more often than not referred simply to the founder of the order, ‘Abdullāh Rūmī.\footnote[356]{One example, among many others, is seen in the subheading of the Divan-i ḥikmet in Mevlena Museum MS 2794, fol. 28b: *der vaṣf-i küll-i ḥikmet dokhterzade-i Eşrefzade Iznīḳī* (“concerning the nature of all wisdom, [by] the son of Eşrefzade Iznīḳī’s daughter”).}

There were other, and even more overt, attempts to historicize the author of the Divan-i ḥikmet and, accordingly, the rest of the ‘Alī Çelebī corpus. Within the seventeenth-century manuscript Manisa MS HK 2967 is found Hadiyyat al-bahiyya (“The Beautiful Gift”), a unique commentary on ‘Alī Çelebī’s now lost Lawāḥ fi asrār al-ḥurūf al-fawāthīh.\footnote[357]{Manisa MS HK 2967, fols. 142a-148a.} The extensive Arabic marginalia accompanying this commentary includes a remarkable biographical note on “the famous philosopher…known as the new author” (al-faylasūf al-ma‘rūf…bi’il-mu’allif al-jadīd). The note states that “the new author” originally hailed from the city of Iznik and that his name was ‘Alī. This ‘Alī, in turn, was a grandson (ḥafīd) of ‘Abdullāh al-Iznīḳī, who was, the marginal note declares unambiguously, “the founder of the Eşrefī Sufī order,” (ṣāhib at-ṭarīqat al-Ashrafiyyah) and who had also been responsible for his grandson’s initial education. The rest of the note incorporates elements from the autobiographical information found elsewhere in the corpus, such as the fact that the author had later become a disciple of Aḥmed Şemseddīn Şārūḥānī. This marginalia makes explicit something that had been assumed by many readers of the corpus: the author-figure was a direct descendant of Eşrefzade ‘Abdullāh Rūmī.

An interesting detail from the text reveals that the commentator himself had not only accepted, but ardently believed that ‘Alī Çelebī was the grandson of Sheikh ‘Abdullāh Rūmī. We read that a certain alchemical operation had been initiated by the former figure, the author of the Lawāḥ, “for His Highness Sultan Selim Khan the First” (liqad ‘amaltuhā ayya’l-mubaqalah bi-hadrat as-sulṭān Selim Khān al-awwal). There are a number of established typologies for
Commentaries in the Arabic literary tradition, the most common being *galalahulu* (“he said,” “I say”). The quotations from the original work can be extensive, sometimes many pages long, followed by the commentator’s own thoughts. Conversely they can be short, a few sentences, or a single sentence, once again followed commentary. Another, rather commonly seen type is the one we have in the present text, which is a seamless weaving of the original text and the commentary, the former being marked by a red over-line. Significantly, the red line in the sentence just quoted ends at Selim Khan—there is no line over *al-awwal*, “the first,” at which point the commentator’s voice is already being heard. This is noteworthy as it will be remembered from the previous chapter that the author of the corpus himself mentions, at least in one occasion, that he had joined the ranks of great learned men during the time of Selim II (r. 1566-74). It is not impossible, but rather farfetched, that the same person was conducting alchemical experiments for Selim I (d. 1512-20). It is very likely that the commentator had added *al-awwal* to Sultan Selim’s name, so that the author of the corpus is pulled back in time to a Sultanic reign that was close to ‘Abdullah Rumi’s lifetime, who was known to have died in 1469-70, during the reign of Selim I’s grandfather Mehemmed II. In other words, Esrefzade ‘Ali was chronologically situated to render his assumed relationship with ‘Abdullah Rumi more plausible. The marginalia accompanying the *Hadiyyat al-bahiyya* therefore constitutes an example for the ways in which early modern readers of the corpus had not only fashioned a new identity for the author-figure, one that was more closely related ‘Abdullah Rumi, but also manipulated existing texts so as to better accommodate that identity.

The marginalia in question does not stand in isolation. Another biographical note is found in the margins of the earliest surviving copy of Mehemmed Naci’s *Cami’i‘l-‘esrār* dating from the

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358 *Hadiyyat al-bahiyya*, Manisa MS HK 2967, fol. 143b.
359 Ibid., fol. 144a.
mid-eighteenth century. The contents of the note resolve a potential problem with the
abovementioned evolution of the author-figure: ‘Abdullāh Rūmī had no known grandchild with
the name ‘Alī. This time around, ‘Alī Çelebī is presented as not only the son of Eşrefzāde’s
daughter, but also specified as Sırr ‘Alī Sultan.360 Unlike the previous ‘Alī Çelebis, Sırr ‘Alī
Sultan is a well-known historical figure. At the time of Sultan Murād IV’s aforementioned visit
to Iznik, he was the leading sheikh of the Eşrefī order and in charge of the āsitāne in the same
town. We also know his date of death thanks to a Persian chronogram written by
Ḩayreddīnpaşazāde Muṣṭafā Efendī on the occasion of his passing which reads: “May the soul of
Sırrī ‘Alī be in heaven,” that is, 1046/1636-37.361 Sırr ‘Alī, we should note, was the son of
Sheikh Ḥamdī and a great-grandson of ‘Abdullāh Rūmī through the latter’s daughter Züleyha. In
other words, he must have appeared to be a natural fit for the epithet dokhterzāde-i Eşrefzāde,
“the maternal grandson of Eşrefzāde.”362

What makes the Sırr ‘Alī Sultan connection even more interesting is a little-noticed
couplet in the Divān-ı hikmet, a rare instance in which the poet speaks about himself, albeit in the
third person:

A great sage of my stature came to this world, but, alas, he is mute
The pen of Lūṭfī resembles a sugar cane that offers sweets to the sons of Rūm.363

360 Istanbul University MS 6808, fol. 39b. The marginal note in full reads: “The late Çelebī Efendī’s real name is
‘Alī. He is the son of the daughter of his excellency Eşrefzāde. [Çelebī Efendī] is better known as Sırr ‘Alī and his
tomb is in India.” The last statement is puzzling, since Sırr ‘Alī’s tomb was in Iznik for all to see. It appears that
there is some confusion here, on the part of the reader responsible for the marginalia, between two ‘Alī Çelebis: the
alchemist ‘Alī Çelebi of Iznik, who is here identified as Eşrefzade Sırr ‘Alī, and Seydī ‘Alī Çelebī, who had
famously led an ill-fated Ottoman naval expedition to India, against the Portuguese. The latter ‘Alī Çelebī, however,
was able to return to Istanbul from India overland, through Safavid territory. There is therefore another layer of
confusion with respect to Seydī ‘Alī Çelebī’s occasion of death.
362 Ibid., p. 32.
363 Istanbul University MS TY 7016, fol. 9b.
The couplet is present in all versions of the poem, including the earliest one in Istanbul University, TY 7016, thereby predating the prose introduction which mentions ‘Alī of Iznik. As mentioned previously, Sīrr ‘Alī Sultan was the son of Sheikh Ḥamdī, Eshrefzāde ‘Abdollāh’s grandson. The Menākıb-ı Eşrefzāde has preserved an interesting episode from Sheikh Ḥamdī’s life—when his wife was pregnant with Sīrr ‘Alī Sultan, the sheikh was apparently at such an advanced age that many commoners in Iznik began gossiping about the real father of the child. The story has Sheikh Ḥamdī rebuking the townsfolk and vowing that if the child is his own, his wife would not give birth before four years had passed. Miraculously, Sīrr ‘Alī Sultan is then born after the passage of the allotted time.\textsuperscript{364} The miracle is relevant as it has retained the memory of the great age difference between Sīrr ‘Alī Sultan and his father—and very likely served to legitimize his position as the grand sheikh of the Eşrefī order. His older brothers (he had at least two) are not mentioned even by name in the Menākıb-ı Eşrefzāde, perhaps indicating that the relationship between them and their younger brother had not been cordial. While contemporary sources are silent on Sīrr ‘Alī Sultan’s older siblings, they make an unexpected appearance in the Yādigār-ı Şemsī, a late Ottoman biographical source on the mystics of Bursa.\textsuperscript{365} Providing no references, and perhaps relating an oral tradition, Meḥmed Şemseddīn, the author, writes that two sons of Sheikh Ḥamdī, named ‘Abdülmü’mīn and Lütfī, had established a dervish lodge in the city of Lefke to the east of Izniḳ. One can only speculate about any role Eşrefzāde Lütfī might have played in the composition of the Divān-ı ḥikmet or whether the work, perhaps incomplete as seen its earliest surviving copy in Istanbul University, had indeed been finalized by Sīrr ‘Alī Sultan. To be sure, poetry would be no stranger to either men—we have already seen the degree to which the Eşrefī order was synonymous with popular

\textsuperscript{364} Menākıb-ı Eşrefzāde, p. 46.
\textsuperscript{365} Yādigār-ı Şemsī, p. 90.
“tekke poetry” in the early modern Ottoman world, and Sırr ‘Alî in particular is known to have left behind a dîvân of his own, which has not survived.

It is, of course, equally possible that neither Lütfî nor Sırr ‘Alî had written a single verse on alchemy, let alone the entirety of the Divân-i hikmet and the rest of the corpus. And yet imagining a connection between the corpus and the Eşrefzade family must have been irresistible for many Ottoman readers, despite the dearth of evidence. In vain they would have searched the works of ‘Abdullâh Rûmî for ample references to alchemy that would have lent more credence to such a supposition. In only two instances does Sırr ‘Alî Sultan’s great grandfather makes an allusion to, or outright mentions, the sacred art: once in a poem from his Dîvân and once in a hymn attributed to him, which is remarkably few given the sheer length of his writings and the popularity of alchemical imagery in similar mystical poetry.\(^\text{366}\) Others may have been tempted to attribute anonymous alchemical works to ‘Abdullâh Rûmî, thereby cementing and strengthening the links between the production of alchemical knowledge and the Eşrefî family. Such is the case, it seems certain, of one of the most remarkable works on alchemy in the Turkish vernacular, the abovementioned commentary to the Kaşide-i Sırr-i Tâ-Hâ, whose date of composition is unknown. The Kaşide itself is a short allegorical poem on alchemy consisting of just thirty-nine couplets that rhyme with the letter nûn. Its authorship was commonly attributed to a certain Sheikh Şâfî (and less frequently to simply the seyyid, a nameless descendant of the Prophet), whose identity is as difficult to establish as that of the author of the corpus.\(^\text{367}\) Like the latter figure, however, Sheikh Şâfî was ultimately associated with a well-known historical figure

\(^{366}\) For the former, see Hickman, op. cit., p. 122: “Kîmyâ-ı ‘ışkı bulduq mîsi [leg. misî?] altun ederûz.” (“We have discovered the alchemy of love, we turn copper into gold.”). For the hymn, see Eşrefoğlu Divanı (İstanbul: Tercüman, 1970), 266: “Kimya ister sen gel sohbeti dervişlerin, saltanat mayasıdır bil himmeti dervişlerin” (“If you seek alchemy/transformation, come to the spiritual exchange (sohbet) of the dervishes, know that the zeal of the dervishes is the yeast of sovereignty.”)

\(^{367}\) Ekmeleddin İhsanoğlu’s claim that the author of this poem is a Zeynî sheikh named Şâfî (d. 1513) is pure speculation. See Ekmeleddin İhsanoğlu et al., Osmanlı Tabii ve Tatbiki Bilimler Literatürü Tarihi I, p. 20.
by his early modern audience—with the addition of a topographical epithet, the name effortlessly transformed the author into Šafīyuddīn Ardabīlī (d. 1334), the eponymous founder of the Šafavī Sufi order and the ancestor of the Safavid rulers of Iran.368 Despite his awkward position as the ancestor of the Ottomans’ troublesome Shi‘ī neighbors, and frequent enemies, to the east, Šāfī al-Ardabīlī was never disowned by the Sufīs of the Ottoman world, who convincingly argued that it was his fifteenth century descendants that had given birth to the heretical Safavids of their own day. Thus, Sheikh Šāfī, who is mentioned on numerous occasions by ‘Abdullāh Rūmī in his Müzerek ’n-nūfūs, written prior to the rise of the Safavid dynasty, without any trouble retained his place of honor in the Bayrāmī and the Celvetī chains of mystical authority in the subsequent centuries.369

As for the commentary on the Kaşide itself, its authorship was never ambiguous. From its first appearance in the middle of the seventeenth century, “the commentator” (şāriḥ) refers to himself in the text, often in the third person, as Eşref Rūmī ‘Abdullāh Mısırī.370 The curious omission of any “son of” affixes (such as –zāde or –oğlī) aside, the person in question is clearly intended to be Eşrefzāde ‘Abdullāh, the founder of the Eşrefiyye and the supposed ancestor of Eşrefzāde ‘Alī, who had become the favored author-figure for the corpus by this time period. That the composition of this commentary was very likely linked to the emergence of the Eşrefzāde ‘Alī figure is attested by more than the commentator’s assumption of Eşrefzāde ‘Abdullāh’s voice. In an intriguing passage, the commentator opines that “had Jaldakī not provided commentaries on this science [of alchemy], it would have been very difficult for

368 On Sheikh Šāfī, see EI 2, s.v. Šāfī al-Dīn Ardabīlī.
369 Somuncu Baba, the spiritual guide of Haccī Bayrām, had received his mystical initiation from ‘Ali Ardabīlī, the grandson of Sheikh Šāfī. This allowed the sheikhs of the Celvetī order, which had initially been a branch of the Bayrāmiyye, to trace their spiritual lineage back to ‘Alī through Šāfī Ardabīlī.
370 Instances of direct references to Eşref Rūmī ‘Abdullāh Mısırī are as common as sentences starting with şarıḥ eydīr (“the commentator says”).
anyone to reach divine knowledge through the books of the sages...”371 This is not the sole appearance of Jaldakī in the Şerh-i Kaşide-i Sırr-i Tâ-Hâ—far from it, his writings, which provided, it will be remembered, a great deal of scientific and spiritual authority to the corpus, perform a similar role for this work.

Let us now briefly turn our attention to the remainder of the above-quoted passage, in which the commentator refers to himself in the third person: “…in this science, Jaldakī is the teacher (üstâd) of Eşref Rûmî ‘Abdullâh Mîsrî. It is through the books of Jaldakī that he [i.e. ‘Abdullâh] understood the symbols (rumûz) employed by the sages and acquired the ability to perform what he had learned.”372 The singling out of Jaldakī, who is able to guide the worthy to both theoretical and practical knowledge of alchemy from the beyond, as the master of the commentator, who is, moreover, supposedly Eşrefzâde ‘Abdullâh, suggests that the commentary is the product of a time in which the corpus had already found its author in the imagined figure of Eşrefzâde ‘Alî. The commentary’s very existence, with its numerous copies in manuscript libraries, reveals the influence of the latter figure over the minds of those who produced and consumed alchemical knowledge in the early modern Ottoman world.373

371 İstanbul University TY 7019, fol. 26a, Süleymaniye MS Karaçelebizade 359, fol. 24a.
372 Ibid., fol. 24a.
373 The said influence is also evident in the makeup of the cast of Sufi characters that had been chosen as the authors of a cycle of Turkish alchemical poems. Dating to the seventeenth century, these relatively short mnemotechnical poems almost always accompany one or more of the alchemical texts that we have already mentioned: the Divân-i hikmet, the Kaşide-i Sırr-i Tâ-Hâ, and/or its commentary. It is noteworthy that many of these poems were ascribed to characters that have some relevance for the Eşrefi order in general and for its founder ‘Abdullâh Rûmî in particular. Consider, for example, the short alchemical poem about the elixir that the manuscript tradition unanimously attributes to Emîr Buḫârî. This fifteenth-century mystic, originally from Bukhara as his name indicates, had become the patron saint of his adopted hometown, Bursa. More importantly for our purposes, he figures prominently in the hagiography of Eşrefzâde ‘Abdullâh as the person responsible for the beginning of Eşrefzâde’s spiritual quest. It is also worth repeating that Sheikh Şâﬁ Ardabîlî, the presumed author of the Kaşide-i Sırr-i Tâ-Hâ, is spiritually connected to Eşrefzâde ‘Abdullâh via the latter’s, as the tradition goes, early teacher and father-in-law.
Conclusion

In the Ethics of Reading in Manuscript Culture, John Deganaïs’ seminal study on the medieval Castilian text Libro de buen amor, the chief criticism levied on the modern scholarship of western medieval literature is that it has been traditionally concerned with the production of critical editions which prioritize the author-work paradigm. This, Deganaïs argues, overlooks the important role played by commentators and copyists in the reading of texts, thus giving rise to a very narrow vision of western medieval manuscript culture as a whole.\textsuperscript{374} Especially relevant for our purposes is the fourth chapter, which sets out to re-situate medieval scribal activity as an integral, and inseparable, component of the texts that were (re-)produced as a result of such activities. When it comes to some of the more recent studies which have justly recognized the significance of scribal activities for medieval texts, Deganaïs is equally critical, noting that these are still portrayed as “peripheral to the creative process.”\textsuperscript{375} The compelling call to scholars to turn to individual manuscripts, with their idiosyncrasies and unique marginalia, rather than attempting to produce an imaginary definitive critical edition of a given text, is one that must be heeded by the students of knowledge in the Islamic world as well.

In early modern Islamic manuscript culture, which, owing to the absence of printing, shares certain characteristics (such as the ambiguity of the relationship between the written word and the reader/commentator/copyist to a degree that is not permitted in print) with that of the medieval West, scribes had similarly been vital actors in the production of texts both in the capacity of readers and authors. Most of the extant studies, however, are concerned with either critical editions, or, in the case of scientific texts in particular, satisfied with bibliographic

\textsuperscript{374} John Deganaïs, The Ethics of Reading in Manuscript Culture: Glossing the Libro de Buen Amor (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), see especially the preface passim.
\textsuperscript{375} Ibid., pp. 116-17.
research that attempts to connect individual works to known author-figures. The latter scholarly activity has been the primary focus of Ekmeleddin İhsanoğlu’s research, which attempts to draw attention to the scientific output of the post-classical Islamic societies in general and of the Ottomans in particular. Future studies have to step outside the comfortable zone of the author-work paradigm and move beyond compiling bibliographic lists. The seeming contradiction of making such a call even as much of the present and the previous chapter are devoted to the author of the AÇ corpus is in fact a superficial one: the author-figure is worthy of scholarly attention not in his capacity of “the producer” of the works attributed to him, but as an object of obvious and utmost interest for the corpus’ early modern audience.

The author of the AÇ corpus, or more accurately the way in which he was imagined, also provides valuable insight on that very audience. We must first note the latter’s noticeable concern for providing a Sufi identity for the author. This is certainly indicative of not only the well-established relevance of mysticism for alchemy (and vice versa), but more importantly the mystical inclination of a great number of the corpus’ copyists and commentators. Indeed there are a number of individuals who were involved in scribal activities revolving around the corpus who can definitively be identified as Sufis: one of the earliest manuscripts containing multiple works from the corpus had been produced by a certain Ḍādirī dervish named Sinan b. ‘Abdullāh, while about a hundred years later the aforementioned Sheikh Aḥmed, also a Ḍādirī, had copied

376 Among İhsanoğlu’s studies of this nature are a number of works of reference, all published in Istanbul by IRCICA, which include multi-volume surveys of the Ottoman-era literature on astronomy, Osmanlı Astronomi Literatürü Tarihi (1997); mathematics, Osmanlı Matematik Literatürü Tarihi (1999); geography, Osmanlı Coğrafya Literatürü Tarihi (2000); music, Osmanlı Musiki Literatürü Tarihi (2003); the military arts, Osmanlı Askerlik Literatürü Tarihi (2004); natural sciences, Osmanlı Tabii ve Tatbiki Bilimler Literatürü Tarihi (2006); and medicine, Osmanlı Tibbi Bilimler Literatürü Tarihi (2008).
the *Dīvān-i hikmet* and a Turkish translation of the *Sīr r-ar-rabbānī* together. The latter work’s translator, Ḥūseyin Ḥatemī, was another dervish, of unknown affiliation.

We should also cite the Celvetī dervish Meḥmed Nācē of Drama once again, whose alchemical writings include frequent and numerous commentaries on excerpts from the corpus as we have seen in the previous chapter. More interesting evidence comes from the numerous unique alchemical recipes and operations that are found in marginalia accompanying the main body of texts from the corpus. In Süleymaniye MS Karaçelebidze 359, to provide one example, a recipe bears the name of an otherwise unknown Sufi, a certain dervish ‘Alī, who was likely personally known to the copyist or himself was involved in producing a part of the same manuscript. Admittedly, these individuals, and others like them, were not just Sufis—they without a doubt played different roles within their respective communities as artists or craftsmen, practiced a myriad of professions, and had interests in other branches of knowledge besides alchemy. Nonetheless, it is quite significant that they chose to identify themselves within and around such alchemical texts first and foremost as Sufis; their self-identity, as it was expressed in the manuscript copies of the corpus, further underlines the intimate link between mysticism and alchemy.

The relative ease by which the author of the corpus was shaped by his readers, his very malleability, also allows us to comment on the accessibility of knowledge (and particularly of bio-bibliographical information) in the early modern Ottoman world. The extant manuscript copies of Kātib Çelebī’s *Kashf az-ẓunūn* as well as very frequent references to it in the works of other authors—indicate that this indispensable companion for the scholars of the seventeenth and

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377 The former copyist’s name is found in Istanbul University MS TY 6247, fol. 125b.
378 Ḥūseyin Ḥatemī is referred to as a dervish in the introduction of a copy of this translation found in Istanbul University MS TY 7034, fol. 2b.
379 Süleymaniye MS Karaçelebizado 359, fol. 75a.
eighteenth centuries was generally available to those who resided in the major cities of the Empire or had the means to travel. The case of the “new author,” however, suggests that this major work of reference was either not consulted by a great many of the copyists, commentators, and readers of the corpus, or that the same group had been able to ignore it presumably because a large portion of the reading public were deemed unlikely to have access to it. The frequent confusion of several ‘Alī Çelebīs in the manuscript traditions of a number of works is equally noteworthy: thus, a treatise written by the fifteenth century mufti of Istanbul, ‘Alaeddīn ‘Alī Çelebī, had been attributed to ‘Alī Beg b. Ḥüsrev, and an astronomical treatise by the famous sixteenth century admiral Seydī ‘Alī Çelebī to (Eşrefzāde) ‘Alī of Iznik. 380 We have already noted above a marginalia from the seventeenth century that appears to combine elements from the life story of this admiral Seydī ‘Alī with that of Sīrr ‘Alī Sultan. 381 Such confusion, however, was not limited to an understandable mix-up of individuals with similar names—an astonishing section in the eighteenth-century alchemical compendium Istanbul University MS TY 7025 states that the alchemical information recorded therein had been copied “from a book” by Jābir ibn Ḥayyān named Mī‘ellīf-ı cedīd (“The New Author”)! 382 That this widely-known designation for the author of the corpus had been mistaken as a book title is a telling indicator that some very basic information was unavailable to at least some of the readers of the corpus.

Needless to say, the reason for citing these examples is not to pass judgment on the state of learning and scholarship in the early modern Ottoman world. They are rather intended to be read as examples of the knowledge that was available in that world (knowledge concerning the names of people and of books in this case, circulating both orally and textually), and yet was

380 The former, Risāla fī dawrān aṣ-ṣūfiyah (“Treatise concerning Sufi dancing”) is the first work copied in Atatürk Kitaplığı MS Muallim Naci Yz K 137. The latter work is Risāla fī dairat al-mu‘addala (“Treatise concerning the equated circle”), found in Kastamonu MS 281, fols. 46b-61b.
381 See above, fn. 66.
382 Istanbul University MS TY 7025, fol. 72a.
ultimately inaccessible for some readers. In certain cases, of course, a piece of information was not so much inaccessible as ignored, superseded by something that better fit the motives of the person who chose to utilize or invent it. That Kātib Çelebī had singled out ‘Alī Beg b. Ḫüsrev as the author of the corpus, for example, was very possibly known to many of the copyists who preferred to accept Eşrefzāde ‘Alī as the real author for reasons already outlined. In other cases, however, such as the commentator who mistook the epithet mú‘ellif-i cedīd for a title of a book, it is obvious that the commentator had encountered neither the information provided by Kātib Çelebī nor the vast manuscript evidence that advanced the Eşrefzāde ‘Alī figure as the author. The latter is a reminder that some of our modern assumptions about how men of letters in pre-modern times carried out scholarly activities underestimate the problems they might have faced or the choices they had to make in accessing what appears to us as readily-available information. In the nineteenth century, and I would argue especially with the advent of printing, such information was rarely overlooked, as can once again be seen in the case of ‘Alī Beg b. Ḫüsrev, who gradually replaced Eşrefzāde ‘Alī due to the publication of Kātib Çelebī’s Kashf az-żunūn in print, while manuscript copies of works from the corpus bearing Eşrefzāde ‘Alī’s name as the author were never to be printed. Whether or not “modernity” (as it pertains to education and the shifting approaches to the source material and fact checking) had as much weight in this phenomenon as the spread of printing is harder to answer, since the two took place concurrently over the course of the nineteenth-century in the Ottoman Empire.383

For some early modern readers, perhaps including the commentator who was under the impression that the “new author” was a book title, the question of who wrote a work was of

383 In early modern Western Europe, for the sake of comparison, newly published printed Latin books of reference were often very costly. The used copies of older printed books of reference, however, were available in the market for much reduced prices. For a discussion of the impact of printing on the organization of knowledge in general, see Ann M. Blair, Too Much to Know: Managing Scholarly Information Before the Modern Age (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010), Chapter 5 passim.
secondary importance to what that work had to say about a particular subject. For still others, the identity of the author took primacy, especially when it infused the contents of the text with an exceptional degree of authority. One possible consideration here is that a great many alchemists appeared to provide seemingly inconsistent methods and diverse formulae for creating exactly the same effects. It is no coincidence that one of the most frequently quoted sayings of the Prophet Muḥammad in alchemical works is ḍābhāṭi k’an-nujūm, biayyahim aqtadaytum “My companions are like the stars, whoever among them you follow, you will be rightly guided”). This hadith presumably served to diffuse some of the anxieties engendered by the contradictory information found in the vast alchemical literature of the Islamic world. Nonetheless, the employment of an instantly recognizable name for the author of a given text would greatly enhance its authority and distinguish it from anonymous ones, or those written by less prominent individuals, hence the great number of alchemical works attributed to Hermes/Idris, Moses, Jābir, etc. In the early modern Ottoman world, and especially among the mystically inclined consumers and producers of alchemical texts, ‘Abdollāh Rūmī was one such household name, along with others such as Cemāl Ḥalvetī and Ṣāfī Ardabīlī, to whom a number of works of alchemy had also been ascribed.385

The near-total absence of alchemical allusions in the writings of ‘Abdullāh Rūmī was not a detriment to the association of his name with a number of important alchemical texts. This, as previously stated, has to do with the popularity of Eşrefzāde ‘Alī among the corpus’ readership, and the former’s assumed Eşrefī lineage. And yet the fact that ‘Abdullāh Rūmī was the transmitter of another branch of knowledge which was intrinsically related to the practice of

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384 This hadith, based on its numerous chains of transmission, is often considered of “fair” (ḥasan) authenticity. The chains, numbering a total of seven, can be found in Aḥmad ibn Ḥajar, Al-Kāfī al-shāfī takhrīj aḥādīth al-kashshāf (Beirut: Dar Iḥya’ al-Turath al-‘Arabi, 1997), 4:94.
385 An alchemical poem attributed to the former figure is found in Istanbul University MS TY 7019, fol. 1b.
alchemy, from the point of view of the early modern practitioners of the art, must have facilitated his inclusion among the great Ottoman alchemists. This branch of knowledge was “the science of unity” (‘ilm-i tevhid) that professed to teach a thorough understanding of God, God’s relationship with the universe, and the ways in which those who walk the Sufi path could seek union with their maker. Since alchemy, for its part, was recognized as a science that permitted its practitioners to tap and utilize the creative energies employed by God in the fashioning of the material world, an intimate knowledge of the former was of prime importance for manipulating the latter.

‘Abdullāh Rūmī was hardly the first mystic to illuminate the gnostic path that led to God and the realization that the Creator and the created are one. Many thousands had trod it before him, and guided others along it. ‘Abdullāh Rūmī was among the first, however, who propagated the science of unity in the Turkish vernacular. Like Yūnus Emre and ‘Āşık Pāşā before him, to name two prominent mystics who had written in Turkish in the preceding century, ‘Abdullāh Rūmī conveyed his beliefs in the widely popular medium of poetry, in simple, unassuming, and sincere verses. Some of his more ecstatic pronouncements (verging on the heretical but never the blasphemous, as commonly seen in certain Turkish tekke poetry, such as that of the Bektashis) declared that he had attained the highest station on the path to unity with the Creator of the universe:

I have been awestruck since the time I beheld Your face, I know not if I am me or if I am You...
Apparently (zāhirēn) poor and powerless, internally (bāṭmēn) I am the Sultan of Two Worlds... The men and angels know not my mystery, within which I am hidden. Indeed I am Eşrefoğlu Rūmī, it is I whom everyone desires!386

386 Hickman, op. cit., p. 164.
The loftiness of the self-image drawn by these lines should be apparent—the claim to being the Sultan of kevneyn (“two worlds,” ie. this one and the next) alone would have marked ‘Abdullāh Rūmī as a heretic. The penultimate verse quoted above is a clear allusion to a hadith historically popular with the Sufis, despite having no chain of transmission, in which God addresses Muḥammad: Kuntu kanzan makhiyyan fa aḥbabtuhu an uʾrafa fa khalaqtuʾl-khalq (“I was a hidden treasure, [and] because I wanted to be known, I created the Universe”).

For the mystics, the object of desire is God, here indistinguishable from the poet other than his physical appearance. The same sentiments find a more powerful expression elsewhere in the Dīvān as ‘Abdullāh Rūmī exclaims:

\[
\text{You think I’m Eşrefoğlı, [but] I am neither of Rūm nor of Iznık,} \\
\text{I am He (benem ol) the Immortal, the Everlasting, I only have the appearance of a man.}
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The significant role ‘Abdullāh Rūmī played in the vernacularization of the tenets of the ‘ilm-i tevhīd, which had been previously expressed primarily in Arabic and Persian, and the perception that he ranked among the greatest mystics of all time, would have in turn made his presumed descendant, Eşrefzāde ‘Alī, a fitting figure for the vernacularization of alchemical knowledge. It was the corpus’ Ottoman readers, however, that linked the two individuals together. We should once again recall that before Eşrefzāde ‘Alī became the author of the corpus, which includes texts that are both in Arabic and Turkish, he first emerged as the composer of the Divān-i ḥikmet. In its simple language and unassuming rhymes, the Divān-i ḥikmet bears much resemblance to

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387 More specifically, this is a hadith qudsī, a tradition in which God speaks in the first person (and typically not found in the Qur’an). It is impossible to overstate the significance of this particular hadith qudsī’s symbolism and imagery for mystical literature and for poetry in general. A brief discussion of the latter can be found in Walter Andrews, Najaat Black, and Mehmet Kalpaklı (eds. and trans.), Ottoman Lyric Poetry: An Anthology (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1997), p. 118.

388 Hickman, p. 327.
the kind of popular tekke poems that were produced and recited among the Turkophone mystics of the Ottoman Empire, including, of course, those attributed to ‘Abdullāh Rūmī.
CONCLUSION

In 1835, Derviş (Meḥmed) Efendi, a native of Istanbul and a former student of Ishāq Efendi, the celebrated teacher of mathematics at the Mühendishāne-i Berri-i Hümâyūn (“Imperial School of Military Engineering”), was sent first to London and then to Paris to study chemistry by the Ottoman government. Upon his return to the capital, he was appointed to the recently established Mekteb-i Ṭibbiye (“School of Medicine”) at Galatasaray as an instructor in physics and chemistry. Later raised to the rank of pasha, Derviş Efendi would author a number of books on these two subjects that became standard textbooks in Ottoman classrooms. In his own lifetime, as well as after his death, he was famed and affectionately known as Kīmyāger Derviş Paşa, or Derviş Pasha the Chemist.

Having started his teaching career in the closing years of Maḥmūd II (r. 1808-39), at a medical school established by the reforming Sultan, Derviş Efendi embodies the momentous changes the Ottoman learned culture was undergoing in the nineteenth century. Among other things, Maḥmūd II’s modernization efforts, which had earned him the moniker gāvur Sultān (“the infidel Sultan”), created institutions in which European sciences were taught to an increasingly Westernized, and Francophone, military and bureaucratic elite. Looking back to this period from the twentieth century, Turkish historians of science justifiably saw the beginnings of “modern chemistry” in the Ottoman Empire and modern Turkey in the person of Derviş Efendi.

389 The Prime Ministrial archives not only document his travels in Europe, but also the presence of other Ottoman students of European chemistry, such as a certain Tevfik Bey, who was sent first to Vienna and later to Paris for this purpose: Hatt-i Hümâyun Tasnifi, 835/37684, 1184/46720/D and E, and 1185/46734. For a brief summary of Derviş Paşa’s career, see Cahit Bilim, “Osmanlılar’da Avrupa’ya Öğrenci Gönderilmesi,” Anadolu Üniversitesi Edebiyat Fakültesi Dergisi 1:1 (April, 1999), pp. 21-22; concerning his chemical textbooks, see Feza Günergün, “Ondokuzuncu Yüzyıl Türkiye’sinde Kimyada Adlandırma,” Osmanlı Bilimi Araştırmaları 5:1 (2003), pp. 8-10.
Needless to say, every beginning does not necessarily occasion an end. The introduction of modern chemistry to the Ottoman world was not the demise of alchemy: alchemical manuscripts, too numerous to count, that were copied throughout the nineteenth and as late as the early twentieth century, are testaments to the continued interest in this branch of knowledge by Ottomans. Unlike Galenic medicine, the teaching of which had been uprooted by the establishment of new schools and the abrupt closure of centuries-old institutions like the Süleymaniye Medical Medrese, alchemical knowledge continued to be passed from master to disciple as it had been for generations. Still, Derviş Efendi was a symbol of things to come. Even if one resists a teleological reading of his milieu, the early nineteenth century can be seen as a point in time when old concepts took on new meanings within the Ottoman society. The very word *kīmyāger* is a case in point: for centuries denoting “an alchemist,” but never fully embraced by the elite practitioners of Jabirian alchemy themselves (who styled themselves as *ḥukemā*, sages, or *felāsifah*, “philosophers”), *kīmyāger* gradually came to mean a chemist, a figure associated with the new Western-style schools and the modern military establishment of the Ottoman Empire. It was not long before that *kīmyā* followed suit, which completed its journey from the realm of alchemy to that of chemistry over the course of the nineteenth century.

Such semantic transformations necessitated the coining of “new” words for the displaced meanings of *kīmyāger* and *kīmyā*. By virtue of its phonetic similarity to the latter word, *sīmyā* came to the rescue. It is not insignificant, however, that *sīmyā* had denoted the “science of illusions” prior to its new position as the modern Turkish word for alchemy. The replacement of *kīmyā* with *sīmyā* suggests an unconscious (or perhaps conscious?) juxtaposition of European chemistry that produced “real” and “scientific” results with the illusionary achievements of
alchemy. Even if the effects of alchemy were deemed to be an illusion, however, the place of its adherents in the fabric of early modern Ottoman society was not.

The present dissertation has been a first attempt, hopefully to be followed by many others in the future, to probe what alchemy can tell us about the social and cultural history of knowledge in the Ottoman world. The exact nature of the links between alchemical teachings and Sufism as it was practiced in the late medieval and early modern Ottoman society deserves a study of its own—Chapter Four should be viewed only as an initial glimpse into this matter. I believe that the Celvetī order of dervishes, who produced not only saints who performed miracles of transmutation, but also several mystics who composed important alchemical treatises, can be used as a starting in this regard. The writings of İsmā‘īl Ḥaḳḳı Bursevī, the most prolific of Celvetī mystics, suggest that his interest in the divine art went far beyond the use of alchemical imagery in his works. Likewise, the alchemical ideas of Ottoman iatrochemists, whose works have been studied primarily by historians of medicine, can tell us so much more about the history of knowledge in the eighteenth century. Finally, the alchemical imagery used in Ottoman poetry, and the literary aspects of Ottoman alchemical poems, are both promising avenues for Ottoman cultural history.

This list of desiderata can obviously go on for many pages. I must admit that the list would be just as long even in the case for the figure of ‘Alī Çelebi, and especially the AÇ corpus, which together occupy the second half of this dissertation and also feature prominently in its first half. Nonetheless, I hope to have established a humble basis for future research, both concerning “the new author” himself and the learned Ottomans who read, copied, translated, commented on, or imitated his alchemical writings. We have observed that the vernacularization of Arabic alchemical tradition by Rumi scholars began in the late sixteenth century, with the most
significant activity having taken place in the seventeenth. The early part of the latter century also witnessed the flooding of the eastern Mediterranean world by counterfeit coinage from Western Europe, which played a significant role in Murād IV’s interactions with a number of alchemists and arguably contributed to a heightened interest in alchemy in Ottoman society.

Furthermore, the vernacularization of alchemical knowledge did not only entail the composition of texts in Turkish (and Arabic and Persian) for a Rumi audience, but also a re-interpretation of certain elements found in Jabirian alchemy by Ottoman alchemists, and above all by ‘Alī Çelebi. Chapter Two has argued that the latter’s alchemist’s theory of a seven-layered origin for metallic substances (each layer corresponding to one of the “seven planets”), his categorization of all elixirs into nine conceptual levels (mirroring the nine celestial spheres), and the fact that he had redefined the mesocosm and microcosm so as to have perfect correspondence between the heavens (macrocosm) and the “world of the divine art” (‘Alī Çelebi’s new microcosm), all suggest that ‘Alī Çelebi had placed an even greater emphasis on astronomy for the practice of alchemy than previous Muslim alchemists, an idea supported by the prominent place accorded to planetary conjunctions for conducting alchemical operations in his works. Finally on the question of ‘Alī Çelebi’s identity, I have argued that the ways in which this identity was shaped and refashioned by his readers, over the course of two centuries, is more significant than unearthing the elusive truth about exactly who “the new author” was. That the Eşrefzāde ‘Alī figure had emerged around the same time that Ottoman Sufi circles were increasingly taking part in the production and reproduction of alchemical knowledge is perhaps the most important aspect of this issue.
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