



GHOST: Geographies and Histories of the Ottoman Supernatural Tradition: Exploring Magic, the Marvellous, and the Strange in Ottoman Mentalities - ERC Consolidator Grant 2017

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ABSTRACT

The project aims to explore Ottoman notions and belief systems concerning the supernatural. Its major objectives will be to explore the meaning and content of the perceptions of the “supernatural”, to localize such beliefs in the various Ottoman systems of thought, to analyze the changes that took place and to associate them with emerging or declining layers of culture and specific social groups. The project will address larger debates in recent historiography about the relevance of the “disenchantment” and “enlightenment” paradigms, integrating Ottoman intellectual history into the broader early modern cultural history.

The research team will explore these objectives and produce a web portal (containing crowd-sourced dictionaries and bibliographies, open access papers and other material), three international meetings, monographs and papers, and an annual open-access periodical journal. Specific research modules will study the rationalist trends in Ottoman science, various aspects of the Ottoman occult and magic, and the formation and development of the Ottoman cosmological culture. A monograph, which will encompass the whole range of the project and incorporate its research results, will be written by the PI and delve into: the various conceptions of the supernatural/preternatural and their development, the presence of spirits/jinn in Ottoman world image, theory and practice of Ottoman magic, attitudes toward folklore traditions, saintly miracles, and “marvelous geographies”. Monographs will also be produced by the post-doctoral fellows.

The project proposes an innovative approach in many ways, in a subject very much in the frontiers of the field. It will research questions such as: What were the boundaries in Ottoman worldview between explicable and inexplicable, natural and supernatural, controllable and uncontrollable? How did these boundaries shift in time, and under what historical dynamics? Were there sociocultural groups having their own, conflicting ways of ‘enchantment’ or ‘disenchantment’? Thus, by exploring the supernatural and the occult in the context of the Ottoman worldview, the project will address a wider problématique on the Ottoman culture and its place in early modernity, especially as it will focus on the role of different cultural and social layers.

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