



## KAŠF AL-ZONUN

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**KAŠF AL-ZONUN** (“Unveiling of suppositions”), a major bibliographical dictionary in Arabic, composed by Kāteb Čelebi Moṣṭafā b. ‘Abd-Allāh, also known as Ḥāji Kālifā (1017-69/1609-57). This book, the full title of which is *Kašf al-zonūn ‘an asāmi al-kotob wa’l-fonun*, is considered the most significant contribution of the Ottoman scholarship in Arabic to the Islamic tradition of bio-bibliographical literature.

According to İlhan Kutluer (p. 321), the first draft of the book was drawn in 1043/1633, but the exact date in which Kāteb Čelebi started the composition of *Kašf al-zonun* must be 1045/1635, when he decided, during a stopover in Aleppo en route from the Hejaz to Istanbul, to devote the rest of his life to scholarly activities after having been occupied for ten consecutive years in various bureaucratic capacities in the Ottoman central and provincial administration (Kāteb Čelebi, 1888, p. 133; idem, 1971, I, p. 15; tr., I, p. 12). Prior to his arrival in Istanbul, it was in Aleppo that Kāteb Čelebi began to jot down his preliminary notes on the Islamic manuscripts in circulation among the city’s bookbinders (Kāteb Čelebi, 1888, p. 133; cf. Gökyay, 2002, p. 37). Inheritance of two large sums enabled him to pursue with remarkable ease this massive project (Kāteb Čelebi, 1888, p. 134), which continued for more than two decades until his death in 1069/1657, when he left behind the final draft of the book unfinished. The finished version of the book is reported as being drafted posthumously by six of his friends (Kāteb Čelebi, 1971, I, p. 8).

*Kašf al-Zonūn* includes, in an alphabetical order, the bibliographical information pertaining to about 15,000 titles in Arabic, Persian, and Turkish,



produced since the early centuries of Islam by more than 10,000 authors. Most of the titles described are in Arabic, but by no means is the author oblivious to the importance of the contributions made in Persian and Turkish to various fields of Islamic scholarship. From an ideological point of view, moreover, *Kašf al-ẓonun* contains a latitudinarian narrative of the written heritage of the Islamic world, as it lists, side by side with the authoritative titles on the most orthodox fields of religious inquiry, the writings delineating the doctrinal tenets of outcast, unorthodox undercurrents. In this sense, *Kašf al-ẓonun* can be viewed as a volume on the intellectual history of the Islamic world (cf. Qadi, pp. 23-75). In other words, *Kašf al-ẓonun*, as a book virtually coalescing the intellectual heritage of all Muslims—Sufis, jurists, philosophers, sectarian Sunnites, Shi'ites, and even proponents of hydra-headed undercurrents of Islamic unorthodoxy—into a panoramic presentation of the intellectual achievement of Islam hints at Kāteb Čelebi's ecumenical concerns, which were to inform, albeit horizontally, Islamic political thought and practice during the coming century and afterwards.

A salient feature distinguishing *Kašf al-ẓonun* from the bibliographical dictionaries produced by earlier generations of Islamic scholars follows from the fact that Kāteb Čelebi's approach to the genre is tinged with an epistemological preoccupation with the nature of knowledge and its categories. On this point, however, Kāteb Čelebi seems to be a mere dabbler, as throughout the relatively long and multilayered prologue to *Kašf al-ẓonun* he rather uncritically and incoherently reproduces some underlying elements of the established knowledge of Muslim scholars on the classification and organization of knowledge. The prologue in *toto* consists of an introductory discussion dedicated to the nature of knowledge, and three chapters (*bāb s*) outlining the categories of human knowledge, the methodology of knowledge, and its producers and transmitters. While Kāteb Čelebi's coverage of the bulk of Islamic *loci classici* on the nature of knowledge is comprehensive, he solemnly ventures to criticize or even synthesize the views articulated by the founding fathers of Islamic theology and philosophy (Kāteb Čelebi, 1971, I, pp. 3-4). In the same vein, the closing chapters of the prologue are confined to such epistemological topics as the rationale behind human knowledge, its general categories and *topoi*, Islamic scholarship, and the classification of Islamic authors.

Interestingly, part of the prologue dilates upon the ethnic classification of the scholarly output and on the evaluation of humankind. The masters of



ethnically segregated fields of intellectual inquiry are listed, with no mention of the Turks, in a linear progression as follow: Indians, Persians, Assyrians, Greeks and Franks, Egyptians, Jews, and Arabs (Kāteb Čelebi, 1971, I, pp. 28-32). As it comes to the rationale (*ġāya*) behind human knowledge, Kāteb Čelebi's arguments ring *šari'a*-minded, as, in defiance of the well-established, inherently secular, "rational (*aqli*)/transmittable (*naqli*)" dichotomy, he commits to bisecting knowledge into the religious (*šari'a*) and the mundane (*ṭabi'i*). To justify this general classification, moreover, Kāteb Čelebi draws on prophetic traditions and the Qor'ān, with the obvious aim of glorifying advancements in religious "sciences," thus implicitly reproving the pursuit of non-religious, mundane knowledge (Kāteb Čelebi, 1971, I, pp. 18-22). The closing sections of the prologue are dedicated to the typology of writers, wherein special attention is paid to the defining characteristics of "commentators" and "commentaries" (Kāteb Čelebi, 1971, I, pp. 34-35), a fact accounting for the inaptitude of Kāteb Čelebi's Muslim contemporaries to produce intellectually original works even in religious fields of human knowledge.

The main text lists about 15,000 titles ordered alphabetically under a plethora of thematic rubrics. The descriptions of the titles listed are disproportionately either particularized or laconic, ranging from a short note establishing the name of authors to the detailed bibliographical notices that often subsume *verbatim ac literatim* quotations from prefatory lines of the book under review to elucidate the circumstances under which the book had been "published," copied, abridged, augmented, and commented by later generations of Muslim scholars and literati. More often than not, these bibliographical notices include insightful comments about little-known books authored by undistinguished scholars. When dealing with more popular and well-known works composed in various fields of religious inquiry, Kāteb Čelebi is especially mindful of the chain of commentators, recording their dates and bibliographical characteristics of the contributions made by them. Though he points out elsewhere that the *Kašf al-ẓonun* project was the fruit of his transactions with the bookbinders of Aleppo, almost nowhere in the text does he mention where he had seen the manuscripts that he describes. In a few instances he concludes biographical notices by expressing his own personal and professional opinions about the specific topic on which the book under review is authored. Two noteworthy examples are the bibliographical notices of a polemical tract on ritual dance among the Sufis and a theological book; at the end of both he succinctly specifies his own religious opinions (Kāteb Čelebi, 1971, I, pp.



864-65; II, pp. 1577-78). A recurrent theme in most of the bibliographical notices of Persian and Arabic literary works is the circumstances under which these works had been translated into Turkish. This “translation movement” that burgeoned specifically under Sultan Bāyazid II (r. 1481-512), Sultan Salim I (r. 1512-20), and Solaymān the Magnificent (r. 1520-66) seems to have been lasted until Kāteb Čelebi’s own days, providing the Turkish elite readers, including himself, with direct access to almost all the masterpieces of the Persian and Arabic literary traditions (see, Naḳjavāni; Sohrweide; Riāḥi, 1971, pp. 70-103; idem, pp. 143-204).

As an indispensable and standard reference book for the next generations of Muslim scholars and literati, *Kašf al-ẓonun* inspired several Muslim scholars and bibliophiles to follow the example set by Kāteb Čelebi, producing numerous addenda on the original work. Mehmed Efendi Višnāzāda (d. 1092/1681), Arabačılar Şayḳi Ebrāhim Efendi (d. 1189/1775), and Ḥanafizāda Aḥmad Ṭāher Efendi (d. 1217/1802) were the first scholars and bibliophiles who ventured to augment Kāteb Čelebi’s work. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, ‘ref Ḥekmat Bey (d. 1275/1858), a late Ottoman şayḳ-al-eslām and a polyglot polyglot poet, and the famous bibliophile Esmā’il Sâ’eb Sencer (d. 1359/1940) followed suit. These efforts notwithstanding, it was Esmā’il Pasha Baġdādi (d. 1339/1921), who composed, over a thirty-year timespan, the most comprehensive and famous addendum to *Kašf al-ẓonun*, entitled *Izāḥ al-maknun fi’l-dayl ‘alā Kašf al-ẓonun*, which includes the bibliographical information of about 19,000 titles in Arabic, Persian, and Turkish (Kāteb Čelebi, 1971, I, pp. 9-10).

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