THE KONYA SCHOOL OF PHILOSOPHY AS A HISTORICAL FRAMEWORK OF OTTOMAN THOUGHT

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Every history faces the problem of periodization, and in order to avoid this problem, we may question the usefulness and legitimacy of periodization. However, this would be denying our understanding of history itself, as well as the more practical way of studying a long history through its properly divided periods. We perceive historical events as meaningful through epistemological frames called 'periods', and if the concept of historical periods is perceived in this sense, it becomes indispensable for any historical study. Thus, we may try to periodize the history of Ottoman thought. Periodization however, cannot take place through just a chronology of events. It must be based on the major trends and the spirit of times. In order to elicit these characteristics of Ottoman thought, we need to cover most of the related materials so that we can come up with a cogent periodization of this history. Unfortunately, until now there is no sufficient study on Ottoman thought to give us a satisfactory division of its periods. For this reason, as a provisional study, we shall divide the history of Ottoman thought simply into two periods: the first is the early period which covers the times from the beginning of the Ottomans until the end of the 17th century, and the second is the late period which covers the rest of Ottoman history.

This periodization is not done haphazardly; it follows the significant changes in Ottoman thought. The Early Period covers the early phases of the Islamic philosophical tradition in the Ottoman Age and its development until the end of the 17th century. Following this century it is possible to observe a sharp change in Ottoman thought and, in this sense, in Islamic thought in general. This change basically represents a decline rather than a change in its spirit and dynamics. Moreover, Ottoman thought cannot be evaluated independently of Islamic thought because it is the continuation of its philosophical

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tradition. In this regard, if we say the beginning of Ottoman thought, we simply mean Islamic thought at the beginning of the Ottoman Age of Islamic history. Ottoman thought, does not have a sudden beginning in history; it is simply the continuation of general Islamic thought during Ottoman rule. This is clear in the early period of Ottoman thought. Yet there are some changes in the general structure of Islamic thought during the Ottoman period. This can be seen especially in the educational system developed by the Ottomans. This paper will concentrate on a philosophical school established in the early period of Ottoman thought in Konya, dominated mainly by the Sufi tradition of Mawlana Jalal al-Din Rumi and, through the efforts of Sadr al-Din Konevi, by the immense philosophical system of Ibn 'Arabi. It is this school which furnishes a framework for the history of the Ottoman philosophy. In order to trace the emergence and development of the Konya School of Philosophy, we shall first outline briefly the establishment of the Ottoman educational system which subsequently became the main vehicle of Islamic philosophy during the Ottoman Era.

I. THE OTTOMAN EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

The roots of the history of Ottoman thought should be searched in the educational tradition established right from the very early days of Islam. *Medrese*[1], in the sense of university, is the touchstone of this tradition. That is why as soon as the Ottomans were able to perceive themselves as a self-sustained state, they established a medrese; the first was the Iznik Medresesi founded by Orhan Gazi in 1331. The professor of this first medrese was the well-known philosopher, Dawud al-Qaysari (1260?-1350?), who was himself educated in a similar institution in classical learning of Islam. Therefore, the beginning of the Ottoman intellectual history was a continuation of the same tradition that of the Abbasids, through the Seljuks, but within the general course of the Ottoman history, this system was gradually transformed into an Ottoman milieu. As more *medreses* were opened according to the needs of society, new terminology

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1   Some Arabic words are spelled the way they are spelled in modern Turkish when they are frequently used.