

SACRED SCIENCE OF DIMITRIE CANTEMIR

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Prince Demetrius/Dimitrie Cantemir was born in 1673 in Jassy (both year and place are uncertain) as a son of the Moldavian ruler/voievoda Constantine and received good private education that concentrated on languages and the knowledge of the Christian religion. For some time, his tutor was an erudite Greek monk, Jeremiah Cacavela. In 1688 he traveled to Constantinople to the court of the Ottoman sultan as a hostage and was released in 1691 by being replaced by his brother. In 1693 his father died and he became the ruler of Moldavia – for a mere three weeks. He was deposed from the throne by the Turks and forced to move to Constantinople. He devoted himself there to literary and scholarly work. He made contracts with scholars of the Greek academy, “a true Sorbonne of the Byzantine traditions”¹ and audited their lectures. In 1710, he came back to Jassy as the ruler of Moldavia appointed by the Turkish sultan, but his rule lasted for only eight months. The sultan wanted him to make preparations for war against Russia, but Dimitrie made a secret pact with Peter I in which he was promised the hereditary throne in Moldavia. However, after Russia’s defeat on the Prut in 1711, he had to flee to Russia where he became a close advisor of Peter I and a senator. He also worked intensely as a scholar. He became well known in Europe and even became a member of the Berlin Academy of Sciences in 1714.² He died in 1723.

Cantemir was active in many fields: logic, philosophy, literature, politics, history, music, Arabic studies, and cartography. He was a prolific author; however, during his lifetime he published only the very first work he wrote, an ethical treatise, partially cast as a dialog, the *Divan or a dispute of a sage with the world or a quarrel of the body with the soul* published in 1698 in Greek and Romanian, and the last work, *The system of Mohammedan religion*, published in Russian in 1722. However, he is primarily known for his *History of the growth and decay of the Othman empire* published posthumously in 1735 in English due to the efforts of his son, the poet Antiokh Kantemir.

Cantemir was interested in philosophy and theology. Although philosophical and theological statements can be found in several of his works, he wrote only one work that can be considered a philosophical treatise, *An indescribable image of the sacred science*, written in Latin in 1700-1705, and published for the first time in 1928 in Romanian.

Man

Like all philosophers before Cantemir, he wanted to find true knowledge, and like many before him, he became disenchanted with the results of the efforts of his predecessors and contemporaries. The only answer to the problem was the sacred science (*sacrosancta scientia*) which established how truth can be found and what this truth is. Therefore, the sacred science includes epistemology along with human psychology, and ontology including cosmogony. Cantemir’s investigations were based on the Scriptures, which were assumed without discussion as the foundation and the starting point. Thus, Cantemir began his investigations as an Orthodox believer and intended his sacred science to be a structure founded on the Orthodox dogmatics;

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¹ Stefan Lemny, *Les Cantemir: l'aventure européenne d'une famille princière au XVIII^e siècle*, Paris: Éditions Complexe 2009, 60. “In this Academy are taught Philosophy in all its branches, and the other Sciences in the old uncorrupted Greek” (H 99).

² Since by that time Cantemir published only his *Divan*, the membership in the Academy “represented more a pledge of confidence for the expected work than a recognition for the published work,” Lemny, *op. cit.*, 199.

however, sacred science turned out to be merely a comment on van Helmont's philosophy.

Jan Baptista van Helmont (1577-1644) was a Flemish physician and chemist, a Catholic keenly interested in philosophy, who espoused interesting and not infrequently unorthodox views on the nature of man, the world, and religion. In his view, as the result of the fall, man consists of mortal senses, mortal reason (*ratio*), and the immortal mind (*mens*) which is man's soul (*anima*) and intellect (*intellectus*). Only intellect can know the truth, but, due to the fall, it is blocked by the senses and reason (*Intellectus Adamicus*),³ and only death can release it from the confines of the body.⁴ Rational cognition is obtained by reason, but reason deals with opinions, not with truth, and, as such, it is not reliable (*Venatio scientiarum* 27). The same epistemological framework is used also by Cantemir.

Cantemir used a metaphor of painting the truth which he did not see before and thus could not even describe (SN 39).⁵ Needless to say, he was unsuccessful in his painting endeavor, since an immaterial light shining from the truth is blocked by the senses (42). Intellectual light indicates that knowledge based on the senses is dead (44). From the beginning, fallen man used absurd and unproven principles of sensory science (59), i.e., science based on sensory experience, which, thereby, was limited if not useless altogether, since the senses see at best only symbolic shadows of what exists (65), and thus knowledge based on senses is "in most cases erroneous" (237). However, the truth can be found not through the senses but through intellect that gives life (59). Thankfully, God sent Mercy, an old man, to overcome Cantemir's epistemological limitations (53). Since God is also called "eternal Mercy" (104), the old man directly represents God. The man has a mirror on his chest and Cantemir was able to see the truth in this mirror. This indicates that cognition should be done through God and in God (65); therefore, theology is the beginning of cognition.

In *The sacred science*, Cantemir, following van Helmont, made a distinction between reason and intellect: "intellect is an inborn, specific, substantial power of the soul, whereas reason, or, more adequately, rationality, is alien to it and constitutes a sensory instrument to be used only to control bodily desires and, thus, it is not necessary for the soul" (SN 223). Van Helmont considered logic as useless, and apparently Cantemir agreed with him when he stated that Lucifer, when tempting Eve, "taught her logic, that is, the art of knowing science through the senses and showed her sophistic syllogisms" (95), i.e., logic was not only useless, but also harmful. However, in *The short general logic* written at the same time as *The sacred science*, Cantemir presented a somewhat different image of logic. As a consequence of the fall, man has a problem with knowing the truth, but God provided a way out, namely the natural light, through which man can reach the knowledge of the true wisdom. The natural light could be here an equivalent of intelligence that through intuition knows the truth. However, this time intelligence is merged with reason, since the rational soul (*anima rationalis*) is now

³ All the treatises are included in Joannes Baptista van Helmont, (1682), *Opera omnia*, Francofurtum.

⁴ Friedrich Giesecke, (1908), *Die Mystik Joh. Baptist van Helmonts (1577-1644)*, Leitmeritz: Pickert, 31-32.

⁵ References are made to the following works of Cantemir:

D – [Divan or] (2006), *The salvation of the wise man and the ruin of the sinful world*, București: Editura Academiei Romane.

H – *The history of the growth and decay of the Othman empire*, London: James, John and Paul Knapton 1734.

L – Краткая всеобщая логика, in his *Избранные философские произведения*, Кишинев: Cartea Moldovei 2003, 275-332.

OM – *Описание Молдавии*, Кишинев: Картя молдовеняскэ 1973.

SN – Неопикуемый образ священной науки, in his *Избранные философские произведения*, 36-273.

immaterial and thus immortal (L 313), whereas before only intelligence, not reason, was immortal. Also, intelligence now is guided by logic as a means to acquire wisdom (290, 314), where logic was introduced by wise men with God's help as a key to the gates of philosophy (276). "Logic is divided into natural (which depends on human nature) and artificial, which is primarily the one given by Aristotle" (278). It may thus be that natural logic is the natural light corresponding to intellectual cognition. Natural logic is apparently of an unfathomable nature which cannot be verbalized and presented in a systematic, rational fashion, and hence is not at all discussed by Cantemir. On the other hand, artificial logic is the one discussed at length by him, which, in his presentation, reaches the highest level in syllogisms. Cantemir would probably include here the propositional logic of the Stoics, the modern predicate logic, and other logics (modal, temporal, etc.). When applying logic, people have to be careful and not use sophistic syllogisms which are simply incorrect (329-331). Because of the danger of using sophistic logic, rational reasoning is unreliable.

Syllogistic logic, however, works when premises are established first. What is their origin? Cantemir did raise the issue in *The short general logic*. He stated that logic was not always necessary; sometimes the natural reason is sufficient (L 291). It is due to natural reason that we know, for example, that it is impossible that the same thing exists and does not exist, or, that upon seeing sunlight we can derive the fact that the Sun rose (292). That is, at least the law of noncontradiction is inborn or recognizable by natural light. Also, somehow establishing a connection between closely related facts can be done by natural light without the mediation of syllogisms – maybe with the help of natural laws, the laws also established by the natural light. In Cantemir's opinion, logic is needed for general knowledge: for universal physics and metaphysics, not for each act of scientific knowledge (292). Knowledge can be obtained with the participation of reason or without its participation; also, knowledge can be particular or universal. Particular cognition without reason occurs when through experience we know only one application of medicine; general cognition without reason can be seen in physicians-empiricists who know many applications, but ignore causes [of illness?] (292). All that would mean that logic is not needed in order to establish what the Vienna circle philosophers called the protocolar statements – simple observation would suffice. Some connections between protocolar statements can also be found through natural light alone. Since experience is memory and observation without reason of things observed many times and the same way, establishing a connection between facts would be done by simple induction (292). However, premises of general logical would be the province of intellect *sensu stricto*, the intellect that relies on intuition alone, not on logic. Therefore, to some extent, the reason-intellect division from *The sacred science* could be fitted into *The short general logic* when intellect *sensu stricto* is distinguished from the intellect that Cantemir confusedly identified with reason.

The world

According to van Helmont, at the beginning God created the heaven and the earth, then the light, then the firmament that separated the waters above from waters below. This shows that before the first day, there were waters, that is, heaven (*Elementa* 3). Also, although there is no mention of it in the Bible, the heaven included another element, namely air (6). Water and air are thus primoval (*primigenea*) elements (7). The Empedoclaen earth and fire are thus derived elements. To show that, van Helmont performed an experiment by planting a willow tree in a vessel filled with earth. The tree was watered by rain or by van Helmont and after three years, it grew to a sizable tree, and yet the earth in the vessel weighed the same as at the beginning of the experiment;

ergo, the substance of the tree is a form of water (*Complexionum atque mistionum elementalium figmentum* 30).⁶

Ferment is “an image of the thing” (*Imago fermenti impraegnata massam semine* 13), which can be included in a seed but can also be, e.g., in dirt, whereby, as then believed, insects were born. Through a ferment, a fragment of matter is organized in a particular way; the ferment “disposes the matter to an idea [the form] of a possible thing” (12). An *archeus* is “an internal efficient cause” that “has the image of the thing generated” (*Archeus faber* 3) and consists of vital air (4). “The seed is a substance in which Archeus already is, which is a spiritual Gas containing a ferment” (*Imago fermenti* 13; ‘gas’ is a term introduced by van Helmont to signify a form of water and was derived from ‘chaos’, *Progymnasma meteori* 29). These and other explanations do not really show what the difference is between ferments and *archei*, and even van Helmont not infrequently used these terms interchangeably.⁷ In any event, they are active vital principles and resemble *logoi spermatikoi* of the Stoics which make things what they are.

Forms are constantly created by God out of nothing (*Formarum ortus* 2). At the beginning of generation, the form of the generator is imprinted in *archeus* (18) that becomes part of a seed that receives a new form from God (19) to individualize a new entity being born. This includes inanimate nature, which does not have seeds, but new forms are accomplished through air that is in all bodies (20).

Cantemir used van Helmont’s conceptual framework to discuss Biblical cosmology.

At the beginning there was water without form and any qualities, abyssal water, or watery gas; the Scriptures call it abyss, but it can also be called chaos. There was also spirit or air (SN 66). It transformed the primal elementary water into corporeal water (67). Thus, before the first motion, four things were created: darkness, water, air, and space. This darkness is “the indescribable and unfathomable splendor of the eternal divine Existence” (68). Darkness fills the infinite void through which the spirit of God hovers above water. Darkness covered formless matter. This cosmic stillness was interrupted by the Spirit of God who is “the embodiment of divine power and of active omnipotence” (69), “an uncreated force, eternally born by the eternal God, infinite wisdom and absolute omnipotence” (called nature by empirical science). The Spirit created the first motion which was the separation of light created out of nothing from abyssal darkness (70), and time also was created, the first day. This light was *lux*; later, *lux* became corporeal, whereby *lumen* was created, which was natural light (of the Sun). *Lux* is the sun of the Truth and enlightens every man coming to this world [John 1:9, same about God (215)]. *Lux*, the first from the visible creations is also “uniquely born Son of the Father” (71) “graciously willing to take the sensory body” upon Himself (72). At first, the two primal elements were in the center of the universe (67).

On the second day of creation, the eternal power put air above water to divide waters above from waters below with the firmament called heaven (SN 73).

On the third day, waters formed a sphere which was compressed to form the Earth (SN 74). Then a force like yeast was spread over the Earth generating τὸ ἔνρμουν of Hippocrates, or *archeus* of Paracelsus – a generator of all kinds of plants (76).

⁶ A similar experiment was described by Nicholas of Cusa in *De staticis experimentis*, the fourth part of his *Idiota*.

⁷ One interpretation states that a ferment is a being with the faculty of life; generated by *archeus*, it carries the vital breath, J[acques] A. Mandon, *J.B. van Helmont*, Paris: Germer Baillièrre 1868, 23. Another author saw the image of an object along with the odor as constituting the ferment which, after converting “non-specific matter into the specific gas ... assumes the position of archeus, the vital principle of the object,” Walter Pagel, *Joan Baptista van Helmont*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1982, 71.

On the fourth day, celestial bodies were created from air; the world *lux* was gathered in the Sun and spread over other bodies (SN 77). Sublunar bodies were made from water and these bodies are changeable. Supralunar bodies are from air and remain always the same. Empirical science (which would be peripatetic physics) is wrong in making bodies in the sublunary world from four elements and bodies in the supralunary world from aether (78). However, Cantemir retained the basic scheme of the peripatetic universe by making the supralunary sphere to be filled with immutable objects and the sublunary sphere to be the domain of change. Cantemir would not agree with peripatetics that the world is eternal; in his view, the world has an end at the time appointed by God.

On the fifth day, water *archei*, i.e., ferments, dormant so far, are activated to generate water animals, fish, and birds in the air. *Archei* have an inner force of motion; ferments have it from the outside. *Archei*, moved by the power of ferments, determine the form of things and assure their preservation for some period of time (SN 83).

On the sixth day, the Earth got minerals and metals (SN 85). On that day also man was created. Previous days were preparatory steps for that day and for the creation of man, since everything was created to serve man (92).

This entire cosmic order was fatally upset by the fall of the first parents. Unlike van Helmont, Cantemir viewed the fall from the Orthodox perspective. Man could sin because of the possession of the free will (SN 102) and because of exercising his free will without reliance on God, thereby opening himself to the temptation of the devil (243). The first parents submitted themselves to temptation and violated God's command to stay away from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, so that the fall was caused by their "most mindless viciousness and most shameful disobedience" and the desire to become like God by knowing good and evil (L 275). This had cosmic consequences, since with the depravity of man everything given to his service became depraved (SN 118). After the earth was cursed, God's power withdrew to heaven (120), and the prince of this world thought that all the rule was his (121).

In his explanations of natural phenomena, Cantemir did not depart from explanations offered by van Helmont. Generally, most atmospheric phenomena can be explained by reducing them to the elemental water: "the only and sufficient material of all atmospheric phenomena is watery gas" (SN 144). This differs from the Aristotelian mechanism of vaporization used to explain all atmospheric phenomena, which is "nonsense and inventions of devilish science which is cursed for the blest" (139). There simply would not be enough vapor on earth to explain all phenomena. There are, however, certain phenomena, which cannot be so explained.

According to Cantemir, the colors of the rainbow are not in clouds nor in the Sun; thus, they are supernatural and so is their order in the rainbow (SN 127) and so is its existence and the time of its appearance – it is a miracle (128). Van Helmont argued at length that colors of the rainbow are not in air or in a cloud; they are in a place and, as such, are directly caused by God – the rainbow is a miracle (*Meteoron anomalum* 16).

Also, according to "the divine hypothesis from sacred books, the voice of thunder has stricken the earth" (Sirach 43:17; the same verse was also quoted by van Helmont, *Meteoron anomalum* 17); therefore, thunder has a supernatural cause (SN 145; *Meteoron anomalum* 18). An efficient cause of thunder is in the place where it happens. Its material cause is in the cloud, which in this place condenses to be transformed into a sulfuric entity (SN 146). Thunder is caused by a good or a bad spirit to instill fear before God's name (147; *Meteoron anomalum* 19).

An earthquake cannot be explained by natural causes and is caused supernaturally: God watches and the earth trembles (SN 151). God "supernaturally visits the earth" (152). Van Helmont also attributed earthquakes directly to God, but he was more specific by

stating that God causes earthquakes it to elicit fear and exact punishment for the sins men committed (*Terrae tremor* 33-35).

Also, time has a special status in the world of van Helmont and Cantemir. According to Aristotle, “the son of darkness and the father of pagan darkness/ignorance” (SN 168), time is a measure of motion; it would be better, in Cantemir’s view, if he defined motion as a measure of time (171). If he were right, then time would come after motion, but motion takes place in time, not time in motion (172). Also, Genesis 1:14 states that stars are in time, not that they generate time (171). Van Helmont stated that time is independent of space, body, and motion; that is, time is a separate being (*De tempore* 4, 30). Cantemir endorsed this view (SN 173, 180). Time, in van Helmont’s view, is inseparable from eternal duration just as the light of the day is inseparable from the light of the Sun (*De tempore* 2, 29). Cantemir sided with this opinion by stating that time and eternity are the same, where true eternity is only in God, and, somewhat more cryptically, that time is eternity in God since time is independent (SN 192), and eternity is time in created things since time is dependent (193); probably independence of created things and dependence on God are meant here, since in the eternal God, time is eternal, in creation, time is subjective and it depends on the eternal emanation (203 repeating *De tempore* 36). Time is the splendor of eternity. It is in, around, and beyond boundaries of eternity just as the splendor of brilliance is in, around, and outside the Sun. Time is our guide to God (206; *De tempore* 46), although the nature of this guidance is far from clear.

Elements of nature are from water; their motion is from ferments; their kind is from *archeus*. Ferments and *archei* cannot by themselves generate forms; thus, forms are results of God’s direct command (SN 86, 218). Cantemir could not accept Aristotle’s solution; “in reality, such a kind of chimerical matter, i.e., a body without a body, a subject without existence and nonexistent essence nowhere can be found.” Cantemir could not find anywhere the Aristotelian matter that would from itself generate forms, nor could he find any preexisting forms (87). Life and form of existing things were created out of nothing. God creates forms until now (88). Van Helmont distinguished five types of life: life of minerals, life of seeds, life of plants, life of animals, and life of an immortal mind (*Vita*). However, life “is enclosed under the identity and unity of a form,” no distinction is made between form and life (*Vita*), and life and form are synonymous (*Vita brevis*); it does not matter whether life or form is divided into different categories. Cantemir distinguished four types of form, thereby slightly modifying van Helmont’s categorization. There is an essential form, a form of stone, metals, bones, wood, human products; that is, there is no truly inanimate nature since everything is endowed with a measure of life. An active form is found in seeds: it turns into its kind under the influence of ferment, from which develops a living *archeus* and something like the soul, “a prelude of the living soul.” The third form is a form of living, moving, sensory beings. It appears, that Cantemir merged animal and plant forms into one category. Finally, the fourth form is substantial, created once, imperishable, since “it carries the image of the universal form” (SN 219). Man has two forms. There is the life of the outer man, corporeal form (220), mortal, earthly, subject to the devil’s laws, the enemy of God, material form. Inner form is the formal substance, immaterial creation, intellectual spirit, God’s image, striving for the good (221), an indescribable form (222). There is no clear reason for this division, except, probably to account for Aristotle’s division of the soul into the vegetative soul, appetitive soul, and rational soul.

The sacred science is a somewhat disorganized work and there is no clear direction of what Cantemir intended to have shown. One thing is clear. He considered van Helmont to have represented the state of the art in science and in philosophy. Cantemir wrote his work in Constantinople and was seemingly unaware of scientific and

philosophical developments in Europe. He apparently did not know Descartes, Leibniz, Pascal, Locke, Newton, etc. and worked with what he was exposed to in the Academy: the work of van Helmont.⁸ He read his work and made extensive notes and excerpts (820 leaves) preceded with short praise of the author,⁹ and this reading led to *The sacred science*. Cantemir was a traditional Orthodox believer who wanted to use modern science to show the relevance of the Biblical account in his world. In a way, *The sacred science* is a Helmontian commentary on the Bible. Cantemir followed van Helmont very closely – too closely, by frequently repeating his phrases and sentences – with respect to science and philosophy, except that van Helmont diverged from the Biblical account by also proposing some unorthodox solutions (e.g., in respect to the concept of sin and the meaning of the fall). Cantemir was highly unoriginal in his work in respect to the content (the literary form is another matter) by following van Helmont when he did not contradict the Bible and following the Bible otherwise.¹⁰ When following the Bible, he did not have any intention to introduce any religious or theological innovations. In fact, theological discussions are almost nonexistent in Cantemir’s writings. As to following closely van Helmont, he very likely felt inadequate in respect to hard sciences and trusted that van Helmont was as competent a philosopher as he was a scientist.

Orthodoxy

The sacred science did not open new philosophical vistas, but it clearly showed Cantemir’s belief in the foundational significance of the Orthodox faith. This faith was a constant in all his works, beginning with his first work that he published at the age of 24, the *Divan*.

The *Divan* opens with a dialogue between a wise man, who signifies the soul, and the world, which signifies the body (D 181). The world is presented as utterly evil, worthless, and sinful. In the dialogue and then in the second part, which is the voice of the wise man, advices are provided for what a judicious person should do about it. All the advices are related to the overarching admonition: *memento mori*.

The world seduces people by presenting itself as beautiful, pleasurable, and enticing, but it downplays the fact that the end of every person is the same, namely death. “Do not be afflicted by the madness brought by the beauty of this depraved world, and do not let your heart crave its splendour” (D 133), because it is a deception and because “the sweetness of the world is poison to the soul” (151). The primary concern of everyone should be the end of this life and the life that awaits afterwards. Cantemir had no doubt that a judgment awaits everyone after death and there are then only two possibilities: the blissful eternity of the saved soul in the Kingdom of God or eternal punishment in hell. Death is really a beginning, not an end, and this short time spent on earth should be concentrated on one’s fate after death. Therefore, the life of each person should be virtuous even if there is no obvious and immediate reward for a virtuous life. People should beware of jealousy, greed, laziness, lust, adultery; they “should be humble, chaste and pure at all times” (128); they should avoid sins and confess them as soon as they can when they do sin; people should not desire wealth or power because they do not bring

⁸ For eight months Cantemir listened to explanations of the Helmontian principles given by archbishop Meletius (H 99).

⁹ *Ioannis Baptistae van Helmont physices universalis doctrina et christianae fidei congrua et necesaria phylosophia*, Георгий Бобынэ, Дмитрий Кантемир – мыслитель-гуманист, in Кантемир, *Избранные философские произведения*, 346 note 10.

¹⁰ An adulatory statement that *The sacred science* is “a fully original work,” Бобынэ, *op. cit.*, 10, is widely off the mark. Calling *The sacred science* a mere paraphrase of van Helmont’s teaching (Klaus Bochman, Vorwort, in K. Bochmann, V. Dumbrava (eds.), *Dimitrie Cantemir, Fürst der Moldau, Gelehrter, Akteur der europäischen Kulturgeschichte*, Leipzig: Leipziger Universitätsverlag 2008, 13) is much more to the point. For Lemny, *op. cit.*, 80, Cantemir as the author of *The sacred science* was a compiler.

any benefit. In all this, the soul must control the body. Life in the world can be harsh, but it plays the same role as purgatory in the Catholic faith (116-117).

In all this discussion, the Bible is the ultimate religious authority and it is quoted “to scold you [the world] and to bear witness for me [the soul] and against you” (D 110). Cantemir does not raise the problem of showing that the Bible should be considered such an authority; he accepted without any discussion the dogmas of Orthodoxy. When the world demands a proof “rational or factual” (110) for support of the wise man’s faith in the future life in the Kingdom of God, the wise man simply ducks the issue by saying that he does not have to prove anything and his faith in the falsehood of the world’s words and the truth of the Bible is enough as an assurance (111, 113). Cantemir admitted that as a child he did not know whether God exists and when praying to Him he did not know whom he was addressing, but he obtained the present knowledge of God through faith in Him (124). How did this faith originate? Apparently, it grew as the result of education, and that is why religious education of children is of such an importance: parents should teach children to “settle them on the rock of knowledge of the Holy Scriptures” (174). After all, no one saw God, but He can be seen through His witnesses, through the Bible, and through His great wonders (157). The latter is the only proof of God Cantemir very succinctly proposed: “It is possible for you to know God and ascertain him undoubtedly as good and excellent by his wonderful deeds that are obvious to your kind of people” (136; 185). This is basically the proof from design which states that the complexity and the beauty of the world can be the result of a design executed by the supernatural power of God.

Cantemir wrote the *Divan* as an Orthodox believer having no doubts about the truthfulness of the Orthodox faith. It may thus be interesting how effective the *Divan* could be. It could hardly speak to an atheist, a sceptic, or an agnostic, since the basic theological and religious problems have not been addressed: how can we know God? Does He really exist? Is Orthodoxy the right faith? The *Divan* paints the world in excessively dark colors and tries to make it repulsive, but this will not speak to someone who doubts that the soul is immortal. The book can reinforce someone’s Orthodox faith and serve as a spiritual edification, and maybe that was Cantemir’s primary intention. In any event, the book tells us a great deal about Cantemir’s own beliefs.

The *Divan* shows Cantemir as a traditional Orthodox believer who did not cast any doubt on any dogma of the church and in that respect the book is uninteresting, since it does not present anything that has not already been said in other devotional Orthodox books. Its unoriginality is also shown by the third part of the book, which is just a translation of Andrzej Wiszowaty’s (Andreas Wissowatius) *Stimuli virtutum* (1682). This part is much better written and argued than the first two parts of the *Divan*, and the second part is basically a rephrasing of the third part, i.e., of Wiszowaty’s book. Wiszowaty made significantly more references to Roman and Greek authors and included certain things omitted by Cantemir (e.g., only Wiszowaty encouraged reading the Bible and books of the saints (D 203-204)), and thus the second part is in a way an impoverished rendering of the third (Wiszowaty’s) part.

Cantemir tried his hand at philosophy and at bits of theology in the *Divan* and in *The sacred science*, and in his later works he touched on these points only very infrequently. With the exception of the *Hieroglyphic story*, Cantemir made only a few references to theoretical issues. He, as it were, discovered in himself primarily a historian and a musicologist and felt much more confident in the domain of facts and events than in the area of theory. For example, his most celebrated work, *The history of the growth and decay of the Othman empire*, makes a promise in the title which it never

delivers.¹¹ Equipped with 22 years of his life spent in the Ottoman empire, Cantemir was very well suited to write about the history and customs of the Ottoman empire, but he never really showed the causes of its growth and of its decay. The book is, as it were, straight, descriptive history with no attempts on historiosophy. The entire historiosophy was limited to a rather trite statement that all empires emerge and then disintegrate (which was presented in a brief essay, “An examination of the nature of monarchies,” based, interestingly, on the Book on Daniel). For a historian, it is more challenging – and more interesting – to trace the causes of both the emergence of empires and of their decline. This part is not Cantemir’s strong point.

Although Cantemir abandoned philosophy and theology in his writings, he did not make any secret about his religious allegiances. This can be well seen in his *Description of Moldavia*, which is largely a cut-and-dried, unemotional description of geography, history, ethnography, etc. of his home country, but he did not write it as a detached historian, but as a proud son of the country – although in exile in Russia – who felt for this country and for its, and his (he was their prince, after all) people. When describing beliefs of Moldavians, he stated that “the entire Moldavian nation confesses Christianity, considering itself to be the part of the Eastern church. ... there were never any heretics in Moldavia ... It may very well be that it was because the Moldavian people did not want to accept scholastic theology and the art/science of sophists-dialecticians, but simply believed that for the salvation of the soul simple faith in the Gospel and in the teaching of holy fathers of the church is sufficient” (OM 171). He called Catholicism in this scholarly work in a rather unscholarly fashion “a venomous teaching” and was convinced that “it was the West that strove from the true Christian faith, not the East” (172). In describing the hierarchy of power in Moldavia, he placed the prince on the top and stated that he “receives punishment from his conscience and from God who in the meantime uses the sultan as a tool for correcting or punishing the prince” (182).

Also, in his other scholarly works, Cantemir did not hide his sentiments about Islam. In his history of the Ottoman empire he observed that “of all the nations in the World, the Turks are the most given to superstition” (H 184) and at least some of their superstitions are due to “that mass of Blasphemy” (276).¹² This is particularly clear in his last major work, *The system of Mohammedan religion*. The title already announces that this is a Mohammedan religion, i.e., a creation of Mohammed, not, as believed by Muslims, a revealed religion. The book describes Islamic religion, but not in a detached fashion: the goal is to show “false prophecies” and “the lies of the Koran,”¹³ and, as indicated in the preface, to unveil “this silly and frivolous faith.”¹⁴

From all this discussion it is clear that from the *Divan* to *The system of Mohammedan religion* Cantemir treated Orthodox religion very seriously. It always constituted a background of his philosophical and scientific endeavors. He referred to it sometimes directly – particularly in his first works – sometimes indirectly or through marginal remarks. There was no need for him to attack Catholicism so personally in his ostensibly scholarly work (commissioned by the Berlin Academy!), and yet he clearly stated his sentiments. There was no need for him to denigrate Islam in his scholarly and authoritative description of Islamic beliefs and rites, but he did not shrink from it. To the end, Cantemir remained a faithful Orthodox believer who had no intention to invent new dogmas nor to offer unorthodox interpretations to show his originality and

¹¹ Alexandru Zub, Early-Enlightenment and causality in Dimitrie Cantemir, in P. Teodor (ed.), *Enlightenment and Romanian Society*, Cluj-Napoca: Editura Dacia 1980, 175; “as a whole Cantemir’s explanation does not go into depth,” p. 177.

¹² The fact that the Koran is meant here can very clearly be seen in the French translation of *The history*, vol. 2, 136.

¹³ Cristina Birsan, *Dimitrie Cantemir and the Islamic world*, Istanbul: The Isis Press, 2004, 78.

¹⁴ Lemny, *op. cit.*, 143.

inventiveness. As an Orthodox believer, he believed in God's providential protection of the world, in effectiveness of prayers and rites, and in the real presence of God here, on Earth. Therefore, frequent attempts to enlist Cantemir as a deist are simply missing the mark.¹⁵ One damning evidence is supposed to be the fact that Cantemir called God "the universal life" (SN 215),¹⁶ but the context clearly shows that Cantemir meant God as the source of life of any created thing, and thus calling Him the universal life does deprive God of His providential status; in fact, it enhances it since that means that the emergence of any new life indicates the presence of God in nature. *The sacred science* phrased it as each form being a direct creation of God.

Cantemir was not an original philosopher, he was not an original theologian – he even hardly touched upon theological issues – and he was not an original Orthodox believer by trying to introduce new theological doctrines. As such, he certainly was not a deist. This is particularly clear in Cantemir's discussion of Feofan Prokopovich's *Primer for youth* (1720). Prokopovich was instrumental in designing *The spiritual regulation* (1721) and was then at the height of the ecclesiastical power. Prokopovich, a sworn enemy of Catholicism, was influenced by Protestantism, and these influences are detectable in the *Primer*. Cantemir criticized what he considered Prokopovich's innovations expressed in the *Primer*, which sometimes verged on heresy. "In each line [of Cantemir's critical writing] he expressed his deep commitment to Orthodoxy and to the accepted church forms."¹⁷ In particular God's constant presence is exemplified by miracles, prophecies, and by "that for the believing in God it is always possible a revelation from above."¹⁸ The sincerity of Cantemir's convictions can hardly be questioned, since criticism of Prokopovich was sometimes taken to mean an indirect criticism of Peter I, and that could be downright dangerous, as exemplified by problems encountered by Stefan Iavorskii.

It is also worth mentioning that the last project was a catechism to be used for the evangelization of Muslims of Caucasus, particularly the Tatars.¹⁹ He wrote to the Synod to publish his catechism in Turkish, but publishing plans were thwarted by his death. Only two sample pages were printed in two columns with the text in Russian and in Turkish. The catechisms was very short, in the usual form of questions and answers; however, there are only twenty questions; for example: "Q: Who are you? A: By the grace of God, I am a man. Q: Who is man? A: Man is the most perfect creation of the almighty God made in his image and likeness and among all the remaining living beings only man is adorned with reason and speech ... Q: Who is a Christian? A: Christian is the one who was baptized in water and in spirit and who believes in the one God, the almighty Father and Jesus Christ, the son of God

¹⁵ Gh[eorghe] Vlăduțescu, L'image du monde chez Dimitrie Cantemir, *Analele Universității București. Filozofie* 30 (1981), 101; Александр Бабий, Дмитрий Кантемир как философ, in X. Корбу, Л. Чобану (eds.), *Наследие Дмитрия Кантемира и современность*, Кишинев: Картя молдовеняскэ 1976, 85, even, incomprehensibly, a deist in materialist sense, p. 93; В[асилий] Н. Ермуратский, *Дмитрий Кантемир: мыслитель и государственный деятель*, Кишинев: Картя Молдовеняска 1973, 73, 80; inscrutably, Ermuratskii categorized Cantemir's views as "freethinking with elements of atheism," p. 105. In his practical life Cantemir seems to have been a deist, as cautiously stated by Werner Bahner, Ein bedeutende Gelehrter an der Schwelle zur Frühaufklärung: Dimitrie Cantemir (1673-1723), in H. Scheel (ed.), *Ein bedeutende Gelehrter an der Schwelle zur Frühaufklärung: Dimitrie Cantemir (1673-1723)*, Berlin: Akademie-Verlag 1974, 18.

¹⁶ Ермуратский, *op. cit.*, 73; Бабий, *op. cit.*, 93; Иван Устиян, *Дмитрий Кантемир – государственный деятель и энциклопедический ученый Молдовы*, Кишинэу: Молдавская Экономическая Академия 2003, 21; Ustiiian actually used the phrase that God is the universal life to claim that Cantemir was a pantheist.

¹⁷ Д. И[звеко]в, Один из малоизвестных литературных противников Феофана Прокоповича, *Заря*, август 1870, 19.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, 27.

¹⁹ E. Lozovan, D. Cantemir et l'expansion russe au Causase (1722-1724), *Revue des études roumaines* 13-14 (1974), 105; А.Х. Рафиков, Дмитрий Кантемир и его катехизис на турецком языке, in С.П. Лупшов (ed.), *Книгопечатание и книжные собрания в России до середины XIX века*, Ленинград: БАН 1979, 138-139; Lemny, *op. cit.*, 158-159.

the Father, and in the holy Spirit proceeding from the father through the Son, in Three persons (лица), one essence, one God, and one Divinity ... [and who believes] in what the one holy, catholic, and apostolic Church proclaims and believes”²⁰. The catechism was planned to include also twenty seven prayers. Prayers, unless they are considered mindless exercises, always involve a believe in a providential God, God, who hears prayers and answers them according to His counsel. This is anything but deism.

²⁰ Lozovan, *op. cit.*, 103; Рафиков, *op. cit.*, 140.