

THE BIRTH OF THE NEW PERCEPTION OF HUMANKIND FROM ŞEMSEDDİN SAMİ TO AHMED NEBİL

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ABSTRACT

The general conviction regarding the humankind up until the 19th century was that human beings were an independent and superior species among all the living beings created by God and this sui generis state was achieved by "reason" which other beings did not possess. This perception, however, began to change and transform through the works of scientists led by Lamarck and Darwin alongside with new data collected by works conducted in geology, anthropology, comparative anatomy, and physiology. Consequently, not only the fact that human beings were no different than other species with regards to material and spiritual characteristics but also the fact that species were able to change and originate from another came to be accepted as well. On the other hand, the traditional perception of humankind maintained its dominance until the last quarter of the 19th century in the Ottoman society but beginning with this era modern Ottoman thinkers paved the way to the establishment of a perception parallel to that of the West by works of anthropology, zoology and geology produced through the utilization of western resources.

This study aims to introduce works in anthropology published in the Ottoman era spanning from Şemseddin Sami to Ahmed Nebil and then discuss the ways in which thoughts on humankind and the origin of humankind (what the humankind was, which age human beings came into being) were dealt with in order to comprehend the process of the new perception of the humankind in the Ottoman society.

Keywords: *Anthropology in Ottomans, The Origin of Humankind, Şemseddin Sami, Osman Bey, Mustafa Satı Bey, Ahmed Nebil.*

(Şemseddin Sami'den Ahmet Nebil'e Yeni İnsan Algısının Doğuşu)

Özet

XIX. yüzyıla kadar insana dair genel kabul, insanın Tanrı tarafından yaratılan canlılar arasında bağımsız ve üstün bir tür olduğu ve bu eşsizliğe de diğerlerinde olmayan "akıl" ile sahip olduğudur. Ancak bu algı, başta Lamarck ve Darwin olmak üzere bilim insanlarının eserleriyle ve jeoloji, antropoloji, karşılaştırmalı anatomi ve fizyoloji çalışmalarından elde edilen yeni bilgilerle değişime ve dönüşüme uğramaya başlamıştır ve sonuçta insanın, diğer türlerden maddi ve manevi özellikler bakımından pek bir farkının olmadığı ortaya konulduğu gibi, türlerin değişebildiği ve birbirinden hasil oldukları da kabul edilmiştir. Öte yandan, insana dair geleneksel algı, Osmanlılarda XIX. yüzyılın son çeyreğine kadar hâkimiyetini sürdürmüştür, bu dönemden itibaren ise Batılı kaynaklardan yararlanarak hazırlanan antropoloji ve jeoloji içerikli eserlerle çağdaş Osmanlı düşünürleri Batı'dakine koşut bir algının yerleşmesine zemin hazırlamışlardır.

Bu çalışmada önce Şemseddin Sami'den Ahmed Nebil'e uzanan süreçte, antropoloji alanında Osmanlılarda yayımlanan eserler kısaca tanıtılacak, ardından Osmanlılardaki yeni insan algısının oluşma sürecinin kavranabilmesi amacıyla, bu eserlerde insana ve insanın kökenine dair düşüncelerin (İnsanın ne olduğuna, insanın hangi devirde ortaya çıktığına) hangi bağlamda ele alındığı tartışılacaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Osmanlılarda Antropoloji, İnsanın Kökeni, Şemseddin Sami, Osman Bey, Mustafa Satı Bey, Ahmed Nebil*

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The leading question that the humankind is in quest of an answer from the moment s/he understands/comprehends that s/he exists is “What am I?” Firstly mythology, then religion and finally science attempted to respond to this question in various ways. Ideas about the origin of humankind to be based on a scientific grounding were only possible in the 19th century and novel ideas regarding the place occupied by human beings in nature were began to be put forward thanks to the developments especially in the fields of geology, biology, and anthropology. Thomas Henry Huxley, who was one of the leading scholars of this century, argued that the determination of human beings’ relationship with other things in nature was the most significant problem of humankind and this constituted the fundamental base of all other problems related to it asking the question “Where did we come from?” with regards to the origin of human beings at the beginning of the second chapter of his work entitled *Evidence as to Man’s Place in Nature* (1863).¹ The year in which Huxley’s book was published also happens to be the year when Ahmet Vefik Pasha’s book containing the first information on anthropology in the Ottoman era was published. In spite of this fact, it was only possible for Ahmed Nebil among other Ottoman scholars to investigate the subject by focusing on the origin of humankind and to explore the subject like Huxley. Indeed, Baha Tevfik, who had added a foreword to Ahmed Nebil’s translation of Ernst Haeckel, quoted Huxley’s argument that the origin of humankind was the most significant problem.

Scholars point out to the last quarter of the 19th century when the first works on anthropology met readers in Turkey and Şemseddin Sami’s² (1850-1904) work entitled *İnsân* (1879) is highlighted. Nevertheless, Ahmet Vefik Pasha’s (1813-1891) work *Hikmet-i Tarih* (1863), which was composed of the notes of his lectures of the same title delivered at Darülfünun, contains the first information on philology, geology, archeology, and ethnography and is significant as it paved the way for future books on anthropology and geology which were written through the utilization of Western authors.³ On the other hand, the time when human beings were studied as biological beings began with Şemseddin Sami as mentioned

¹ Thomas Henry Huxley, *Evidence as to Man’s Place in Nature*, London 1863, p. 57.

² For a better understanding of Şemseddin Sami’s role and significance in our history of anthropology please see Remzi Demir, *Philosophia Ottomanica*, Vol. 3, Ankara 2007, pp. 95-108. Also see Zafer Toprak, *Türkiye’de Popülizm 1908-1923*, İstanbul 2013, pp. 68-76.

³ Ahmet Vefik Pasha, *Hikmet-i Târih*, Abbreviated by Remzi Demir, Bilal Yurtoğlu, Ali Utku, Konya 2013, p. 20.

above. After a couple of years Osman Bey⁴, who wrote the first ethnography book published in Turkey by collecting the lecture notes of his professor Andreas Mordtmann, followed Şemseddin Sami. Scholars, who wrote on and about anthropology, besides Şemseddin Sami and Osman Bey, were Mustafa Satı Bey⁵ and Ahmed Nebil⁶. Mustafa Satı Bey questioned the concept of “sacred” history in his work *Etnografya: İlm-i Akvâm*, in which he used illustrations and which he wrote based on the notes of his ethnography course he taught at Mekteb-i Mülkiye. Ahmed Nebil also wrote *İnsânın Menşesi*⁷ which was based on the text of the presentation at the International

⁴ As is known, Andreas David Mordtmann (1811-1879), who was one of the leading orientalist of the 19th century, had lived in Istanbul for many years and had served as an educator and civil servant. Mordtmann had taught not only statistics but also geography and ethnography at Mekteb-i Mülkiye and his notes on ethnography were collected as a book by one of his first students Osman Bey (1856-1920) and published as *İlm-i Ahval-i Akvam* in 1884. Please see Yeliz Okay, *Etnografya'nın Türkiye'ye Girişi ve İlm-i Ahval-i Akvam*, İstanbul 2012.

⁵ For Mustafa Satı Bey's life, works, and his work *Etnografya: İlm-i Akvâm*, please see Çiğdem Özbay, *Mustafa Satı El-Husrî'nin Etnografya Tarihimizdeki Yeri*, Unpublished MA Thesis, Ankara University Social Sciences Institute, 2014 and Çiğdem Özbay, “Mustafa Satı Bey ve Biyoloji Tarihindeki Yeri”, *Dört Öge*, Issue 8, Ankara 2015, pp. 89-110.

⁶ Although Ahmed Nebil's (Çıka) date of birth is not known, various sources offering limited information about his life state that he went to Albania after 1913 having his naturalization changed and worked as a journalist there until 1945 when he was assassinated by Enver Hoxha's mobs. Ahmed Nebil's literary life began with the publication of his work “Uçurtma” in Izmir newspaper and he published prose poems and philosophical, political, and literary works in such journals as *Yirminci Asırda Zeka*, *İştirak*, *Çocuk Dünyası*, *Tenkid*, *Teşvik*, *Eşek*, *Karagöz*, *Haftalık İzmir*, and *Piyano*. See İrfan Karakoç, “Türkiye’de Sosyalist Düşüncenin Az Bilinen Bir İsmi Ahmed Nebil”, *Tarih ve Toplum*, 191, 1999, pp. 5-6.

⁷ Ernst Haeckel (1834-1919), who was also known as the “German Darwin,” was among the leading materialists of the 19th century and he was invited to the 4th International Zoology Conference held at Cambridge between August 22 and 27 in 1898 and was asked to talk about one of the biggest subjects which dominated modern zoology and was in close relationship with other scientific fields at the same time. Haeckel presented a paper titled “Our Present Knowledge of the Descent of Man” on August 26 since, according to him, there was no other subject/problem which would offer general benefit, higher philosophical significance other than the origin of humankind. The presentation which was welcomed with positive reactions at the conference was first published in the December 1898 issue of *Deutsche Rundschau*. The work was later published as a book in December 1898 having been translated into English as *The Last Link Our Present Knowledge of the Descent of Man*. Dr. Hans Gadow, who had been Haeckel's student for some time, also contributed to the book and added biographical information on the lives of such scholars as Lamarck, Cuvier, and Virchow and some notes under the titles of cell theory, evolutionary factors, geological time, and evolution. Further, Gadow also added a small dictionary about the terms used in the text at the end of the book. Haeckel's presentation, which was confirmed by an ample number of elite zoologists, anatomists, and paleontologists, was also translated into French from the seventh

Zoology Conference by Ernst Haeckel, who was one of the leading scholars of the 19th century and by doing so he put a thoroughly oppositional text to the understanding of humankind by the established paradigm into the agenda of the Ottomans. Therefore, *İnsân ve Yine İnsân* (1886) by Şemseddin Sami alongside with *İlm-i Ahval-i Akvam* (1884) by Osman Bey, *Etnografya: İlm-i Akvâm* (1911) by Mustafa Satı Bey, and *İnsânın Menşe'î* (1911) by Ahmed Nebil will help us understand the ways in which the perception of humankind in the Ottoman society were exposed to change and transformation.

What is Humankind?

Şemseddin Sami first cites different opinions about human beings while he responds to the question “What is Humankind?” in the first chapter of his work *İnsân* and then he states that the human body, which he sees as more perfect than that of all animals, was created in the most beautiful way possible but he also underlines that there was no difference at large. A human being has common points with other animals with regards to both the nature and the form of the materials making up his/her body and the nutrition of his/her body alongside with the movements and functions of his/her external and internal organs. Human beings are in congruence with other animals even in some emotional and mental states. But since reason and comprehension are unique to people, this spiritual light is enough to differentiate human beings from other animals.⁸

Osman Bey, on the other hand, defines human beings as a species in the mammal class in physicality but crowned with reason in the chapter of his work “What is Humankind?”. Human beings possess abilities like intelligence, differentiation, abstraction, dreaming, and speaking. Having defined human beings in this way, Osman Bey asks such questions as “How did human beings come into being, in other words, were they directly created or did they descend from an animal which was previously there or were they the descendants of monkeys?” and offers answers within the following context: He, first of all, states that some scholars of nature argued that human beings came into being as a result of the gradual development of

German edition as *État Actuel de Nos Connaissances sur L'Origine de L'Homme* with a foreword by Dr. L. Laloy in 1900. Ahmed Nebil published *İnsânın Menşe'î* in 1911 based on the French text as well. See İnan Kalaycıoğulları, “Ahmed Nebil ve *İnsânın Menşe'î*”, *Dört Öge*, Issue 6, Ankara 2014, pp. 89-132.

⁸ Şemseddin Sami, *İnsan*, Ed. Galip Akın, Ankara 1998, p. 22.

animals and some others speculated that human beings descended from monkeys but he underlines that they did not have sound proof to validate for such hypotheses adding that he believed that the human species were directly created as sacred creatures by the creator of the universe. He bases his conviction on the fact that human beings have little brain, or cerebellum. This organ which animals do not have is a sign that human beings did not descend from monkeys or other animals but were directly created.⁹

Moreover, Osman Bey, in different chapters of his work, underlines that human beings were superior to animals in such cases as well: The brains of monkeys, which are the closest to human beings, are smaller than that of humans. Although the auditory, visual, and olfactory senses of some animals are superior to than those of human beings, the five senses are only compact and perfect in humans. The head is composed of the skull and face. The face is more developed than the skull among animals whereas the skull is superior to the face in humans. Speaking is the translator of perception and humans relate and explain their ideas through speaking to others. Although animals relate their sadness and pain through the sounds they make, this form of expression is not adequate enough to explain the reasons of these said emotions. Human beings, on the other hand, are able to express themselves in a right and open manner by the transformation of the sounds they make into words. Further, humans can succeed in conveying their emotions and ideas to people who are away and to the future by way of writing which they invented. Humans are morally superior to animals as well because the ability to differentiate between the good and the bad is peculiar to human beings.¹⁰

Mustafa Satı explains his views on evolution in the introductory part of the chapter of his work titled "The General Condition of Man" and looks for answers to such questions as "What is the place of man in nature?", "What is his relationship with other creatures and what is the level of this relationship?". According to Satı Bey, human beings are the members of the section eutherians of the mammal class of the vertebrate branch of the world of animals with tissues and there is no controversy among natural scientists about this issue. The main arguments and controversies cover the issue of the place of human beings within the class of mammals. Following this argument, Satı Bey attempts to lay out the differences and similarities between humans and monkeys in order to make his readers understand whether Linné's classification, in which the author had handled humans in

⁹ Okay, *ibid*, pp. 137-138.

¹⁰ Okay, *ibid*, pp. 142-147.

the same class as monkeys, or Cuvier's classification, in which the author had placed humans within the class of two-handed and animals within the four-handed class, was correct. Sati Bey states that humans and animals share a great deal of physiological and anatomical common characteristics and these similarities are stronger between hominoid monkeys (orangutan, gorilla, chimpanzee, and gibbon) and humans adding that hominoid monkeys rather than ordinary monkeys are closer to human beings. He argues that there is a similarity between humans and hominoid monkeys with regards to the structure of the brain, skull, position and direction of the head, the connection between the skull and the spine, the number of teeth, the forms and styles of the liver, lungs, pelvis, and nails and frankly states his view on the subject by saying "In short, there is no reason to place humans and monkeys -with regards to their bodily shapes- in separate classes."¹¹

Mustafa Sati argues the following against some scholars who firstly saw humans' and animals' being in the same class as something appropriate but defended that there were great differences between these two species in spiritual characteristics in his response to whether humans had superior qualities than other animals: The spiritual differences between humans and animals are not absolute and certain but are relative. To argue that reason and intelligence are unique to only humans and animals lack such capabilities is groundless, because animals also possess such abilities as questioning, comparing, and justification. The difference between animals and human beings consists of differences of quantity and level, not quality. The thing that makes humans more privileged than animals is speech, talking. This is the reason why human beings came to be mature and developed to such a degree. Animals also have organs for speaking like people do but speaking happens much more easily in humans since the human tongue has more mobility. Animals can relate their problems to others by uttering some sounds as well. Therefore, speech differentiates humans from animals but it does not make them different.¹²

According to Sati Bey, aesthetic comprehension, moral and religious attitudes, and the ability to devise and use tools cannot be seen as characteristics that make humans certainly different from animals. In summary Sati Bey argues the following about these issues: Simple and vulgar understanding of beauty which many tribes have is also present in animals. The care taken by birds to embellish their nests can be offered as

¹¹ Özbay, *ibid*, p. 107.

¹² Özbay, *ibid*, p. 108.

an example for this. Morality and religion are not unique to humans either. All tribes have moral sensations and there is a differentiation between the good and the bad. Morality is composed of social habits and animals have such habits as well. Animals that go against these are punished. For example, it was seen that females that cheated on their partners were killed by birds of the same kind in cranes, storks and many other birds. The invention and utilization of tools are not unique to humans either, because some monkeys use pieces of branches in order to protect themselves and pieces of stone to crack hard-shelled fruits.¹³

Having introduced the definition of human beings in the first three works we have investigated, we can move on to Ahmed Nebil's translation *İnsânın Menşei*, which was largely ignored in studies¹⁴ covering works on anthropology in the Ottoman era but which occupies a rather important place in the said history. According to Ahmed Nebil, human beings are members of a primate order regarded to be the most developed living beings also covering lemurs and monkeys within Linné's taxonomic classification, and although human beings have some differences from anthropoids in morphological ways within the framework of information collected from the fields of comparative anatomy, fossil science, and ontogeny, they are very much similar to anthropoids specifically in anatomical and histological ways. Ahmed Nebil, thus shortly defining human beings, also uses the law on the anatomy of primates, which he calls the "Huxley Theory," in the phylogeny of human beings. Within this context he argues that there is a relationship and kinship among all animal and plant races and reaches the following conclusions based on this idea:¹⁵

I. Primates descended from an ancestor called archiprimas and the order of primates is made up of these three groups: Lemurs, monkeys, and humans.

II. Two sequences of primates and lemurs are the oldest and most primitive monkeys and these are the origins of true monkeys.

III. True monkeys are divided into two as eastern and western monkeys according to geographical classification. Eastern monkeys are called monophyletic monkeys. These accounts for a branch of prosimians

¹³ Özbay, *ibid*, p. 93.

¹⁴ See Okay, *ibid*, p. 94. Also see Galip Akın, *Antropoloji ve Antropoloji Tarihi*, Ankara 2011, p. 126-127.

¹⁵ Ahmed Nebil, *İnsânın Menşei*, İstanbul 1911, pp. 28-34.

and the relationship of this group with the monkeys of the new world has been thoroughly understood.

IV. Human beings descended from the race of catarrhinis which is extinct now. This sequence substantially belongs to a type of monkeys referred to as anthropoids that are without tails and have five sacral vertebrae. If the ancestors of anthropoids were to be searched for it will be understood that these are also monkeys with three or four sacral vertebrae.

Ahmed Nebil, like Mustafa Satı Bey, has a different stance than Şemseddin Sami and Osman Bey regarding the issue whether humans are superior to other animals or not and states the following: "A general comparison of vital functions from an unbiased view will show us that there is no fundamental difference between human beings and monkeys. Our nutrition, digestion, circulation of our blood, our breathing, and all our other physical and chemical vital events are fully found in anthropoids as well. We can even insist on our argument in mobility and sentimentality. Monkeys' feelings are also contingent upon the same physical and chemical laws just like our feelings. The skeletal mechanism in our bodies and the movement of our muscles are also naturally contingent upon the same leverage laws as in anthropoids. It was once said that walking on two feet was a special ability for humans. But gorillas, chimpanzees, and specifically monkeys called gibbons also have this ability completely."¹⁶

According to Ahmed Nebil, we can also have the same evaluation about language, because anthropoids can express their various feelings, desires, loves, and hates through different sounds as well. Yet there is a striking deficiency and lack in this aspect, but the same deficiency and lack can also be found in children. On the other hand, Ahmed Nebil also states that mammals and birds express a lot through their own voices and the fact that this should be called a language is accepted by all and writes: "The songs of birds are a naturally selected characteristic of language just like the songs of human beings. There are those among the anthropoids that utter harmonious voices like this. Especially gibbons or the monkeys referred to as siamangs (*Hylobates syndactylus*) can utter completely octave-coherent sounds beginning with F in a smooth and clear voice. Now the theory that language and reason are unique only to human beings is refuted by everyone."¹⁷

¹⁶ Ahmed Nebil, *ibid*, pp. 35-36.

¹⁷ Ahmed Nebil, *ibid*, p. 36.

Ahmed Nebil refers to the results of recent comparative anatomy and physiology studies to argue against the argument that the human spirit is a special material and thus cannot have descended from the spirit of monkeys. According to these recent studies, first of all, the discoveries of the science of comparative anatomy within the last decade demonstrated that not only the visible anatomy but also the histology of the brain of anthropoids and humans were completely common. "Although there is a rather large difference in volume among various parts of the human and monkey brains, this difference is smaller in comparison to the anthropoids that are developed monkeys and catarrhinis that rather fall behind. When one especially takes cynocephali into consideration, this difference in volume gains much significance."¹⁸ Secondly, anatomy demonstrates that the rather obscure formation of the human brain is the same as other vertebrates. The special form of the primate brain is composed of the gathering of such simple embryos that the same formation in human beings as well as anthropoids draws attention. Thirdly, comparative physiology studies show through various observations and experiments that the nervous system is the cause of all physical and chemical events in both humans and other mammals, and the sensation of conscience made up of some emotional complexity cannot be separated from this condition. Fourthly, comparative pathology confirms that various mental disorders referred to as the diseases of the soul are completely shared by humans and mammals close to humans.¹⁹

During Which Age the Humans Appeared?

Şemseddin Sami offers his evaluation as to the age human beings appeared in the second chapter of his *İnsân* and asks the question "When did this odd creature called human appear?" According to him, since years and relatively centuries are used to pinpoint recent events, they are not useful in the search for an answer to this question. One needs to use geological eras here. Although there was still a controversy over this issue since the time humans appeared could not be determined even in these times, one hoped that this could be discovered one day based on further developments in geology. When we carefully examine the remains in the land getting rid of our adherence to some past rumors, we can see that the

¹⁸ Ahmed Nebil, *ibid*, pp. 37-38.

¹⁹ Ahmed Nebil, *ibid*, p. 38.

appearance of human beings on earth is both rather new and rather old. In comparison to the creation of the world and the appearance of other animal species, human beings' appearance is rather new and is in fact like it happened yesterday. On the other hand, human beings are not a species of seven, eight, ten, or fifteen thousand years, as is generally assumed, and hundreds of thousands of years, which are impossible to pinpoint beginning with the time of its appearance, have passed since. As the information on and findings of geology, which is one of the inventions of the 19th century, our knowledge of human beings will increase as well and the history of humankind will mature. Recently geologists have found many fossils in the land and consequently scientists have reached the verdict that human beings were not a novel species but had lived on the strata called the Fourth Period and even on the strata called the Third Period, which was even older than that, since their traces were seen in Pliocene and Miocene epochs.²⁰

Osman Bey refers to the data offered by paleontology to investigate when and where human beings first appeared and mentions these points: No human traces were found in the first, second and third time epochs. The first human traces were seen in the fourth epoch when humans struggled with mammoths and similar animals. An animal and a plant in a specific place cannot exist on another continent but human beings, as opposed to these species, succeeded in expanding to every habitable place on earth. Therefore, human beings were created at a single point and as a single species and the possibility that its opposite might happen is something astonishing and exceptional.²¹

Mustafa Satı Bey opposes the ideas based on sacred scripture that human beings appeared six thousand years ago at the beginning of his argument on this subject and reminds his readers of the fact that the pictures in Egyptian monuments belonged to seven thousand years before, while Egyptian myths and traditions belonged to thirty thousand years before and Chinese myths to a hundred and twenty thousand years before. Further, according to him, the excavation of animal fossils and stone tools, which are doubtless human made, are proofs that human beings existed even in those times when those animals lived and when the strata of the earth began to form. The pictures seen on the walls of some caves and on some bones also leave no doubt that human beings were the contemporaries of animal fossils of the fourth epoch. Moreover, it is possible to come across human works within the formation of the third epoch as

²⁰ Şemseddin Sami, *ibid*, pp. 22-25.

²¹ Okay, *ibid*, p. 138.

well. Various bones with scratches and some long and some circular tinderboxes with pointed and sharp edges can be given as examples of this. On the other hand, although one cannot exactly argue that the scratches and indentations on the bones are human-made, the forms of the tinderboxes, the fact that they are multifaceted, and their similarity to the stone tools of the fourth epoch point out to the fact that these were not randomly formed. Therefore, one can argue that the first human beings appeared through the middle of the third epoch, or at the very least through the end of the same epoch. According to him, the fact that all the samples of the mammals of the third epoch were formed can be offered as a proof for the validity of this assignation.²²

Ahmed Nebil, on the other hand, investigates the appearance of human beings based on developments offered at a recent conference. According to this, the humanoid monkey *pithecanthropus erectus*, which was discovered by Eugène Dubois (1858-1940) and submitted to the information of the participants of the congress held in Leiden, openly complements the intermediate form between monkeys and human beings. He states that this finding formed yet another chain of the transition between animals and human beings and this species, called *prothylobates* by Dubois, was materially similar to the gibbons of the time and adds: The findings of this species were found in Central Asia and the center of Europe. The simians, which are considered to be the origin of all monkey species, are the animals of the early Miocene period. On the other hand, the fossils of this species are found in East Indian lands of the third epoch and on the Pliocene strata of Shivalik hills. One needs to look at these two examples in order to understand that humanoid monkeys form a transitional chain between anthropoids and human beings: The first is the fact that the femur of a fossil discovered in Java was completely shaped like a humanoid; the second is the relative largeness of its skull.²³

Ahmed Nebil then states that the fossils found by many scientists conducting their studies in different regions introduce us to the ancestors of primates and offers information about the number of teeth and the variety of those fossils found. At this point he talks about the theory that eutherians, which he referred to as the first ancestors of human beings, originated from an older ancestor and even from an animal from the Cretaceous Period. After drawing attention to the difficulties in protecting and excavating the findings from the second and third epochs, he writes: "The major lines of the

²² Özbay, *ibid*, p. 98.

²³ Ahmed Nebil, *ibid*, pp. 46-49.

genealogy of primates continue in a very clear way beginning with the prosimiae of the Eocene epoch” and argues that the intermediate form and the continuation of descent between the primate order lemurs and human beings can be very clearly proven and demonstrated. Ahmed Nebil, who also supports the idea that comparative anatomy and ontogeny can give us rather accurate information about the fact that eutherians of the Cretaceous Period originated from marsupials, states that there is no doubt that vertebrate animals originated from reptiles or amphibians when all these ideas are summarized.²⁴ According to him, if we take the oldest examples of our lineage into consideration and go back to the very old times among vertebrates and continue our investigation, the relationship between us and the living beings of the Paleozoic and Mesozoic Eras will be unfolded; that is: The monophyletic origin of all the mammals from Monotremata towards human beings is not an obscure hypothesis anymore but a fully determined fact. All the living and extinct mammals that we know of originated from a common ancestral form of the Triassic or Permian Periods and this form should have originated from the reptiles of the Permian or possibly the Carboniferous Periods. Reptiles, on the other hand, originated from amphibians. While amphibians originated from the fish of the Devonian Period and they were in turn originated from lower vertebrates. The main problem with this issue is the origin of the vertebral system and its generation from invertebrates. But this problem is not as important as the problem pointing out to the fact that human beings are members of the primate group and all primates descended from a single common origin. Consequently, zoology unfolds this fact with proofs based on the theses of Lamarck and Darwin. Our current knowledge of the origin of human beings increased dramatically within the last two decades through the great developments in paleontology, comparative anatomy, and phylogeny. These developments demonstrate the fact that the closest ancestors of human beings among eutherians were primates and the closest ancestors of eutherians, in turn, were catarrhini. Chimpanzees and gorillas among humanoids called anthropoids are the ones that are most similar to humans. On the other hand, gibbons can be regarded as an ancestor of all anthropoids of the Miocene Epoch with their rather primitive and general forms.²⁵

²⁴ Ahmed Nebil, *ibid*, pp. 55-59.

²⁵ Ahmed Nebil, *ibid*, pp. 62-75.

Conclusion

When the works which paved the way to the gradual establishment of the new perception of the humankind in the Ottoman society are investigated, one can pinpoint two different attitudes towards approaches to and handling of the subject. The first is the fact that the above mentioned authors approach their subjects in line with their professions, world views, and the period they lived in. According to this, Şemseddin Sami, who was a linguist and a man of letters publishing his works during the reign of Abdülhamit II, and Osman Bey, who was a civil servant, can be placed on one side while Ahmed Nebil, who tried to convey his thoughts and works to wider masses during the relatively free environment of the 2nd Constitutional Period and who was also one of the first Ottoman socialists, and Mustafa Satı Bey, who played a significant role in the Young Turks movement and who was one of the lecturers of Mekteb-i Mülkiye, can be placed on the other. In other words, neither Şemseddin Sami nor Osman Bey had a grasp of biology and taxonomy as much as Mustafa Satı Bey, and specifically Ahmed Nebil. Although they were partly acquainted with the latest developments in such scientific fields as geology and anthropology, they attempted to blend these with religious and mythological information and were not fully able to renounce the traditional perception stating that the most fundamental difference between human beings and other animals was reason. This might, of course, be affected by the fact that anthropology back then was a newly developing scientific field. On the other hand, Mustafa Satı Bey offered the outlines of this “new human” breaking the ties with the traditional perception by placing modern academic anthropological data in his work comprised of lecture notes while Ahmed Nebil investigated the “new human”, which could be a strong alternative to the understanding of human beings in traditional Islamic teaching, in its entirety focusing more on its biological features by utilizing the latest scientific developments in his work entitled *İnsânın Menşe’i*.

The second point is that, neither Şemseddin Sami nor Osman Bey scientifically argued the ways in which human beings and other living beings first came into being. In spite of this, it is seen that Mustafa Satı Bey partly and Ahmed Nebil fully investigated the subject and claimed a relationship and a kinship between all animal and plant species.

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