

**Translation of Excerpts from *Darürrahat Müslümanları*
(Muslims of the Peaceful Country) by İsmail Gaspıralı**
Çiğdem Pala Mull

Introduction

The Crimean writer İsmail Gaspıralı, also called İsmail Gasprinski, (1851–1914) was a Turkic journalist and writer who was a strong advocate for the cultural development of the Muslim communities living under Russian rule. He became a leader and a symbol of the intellectual awakening of not only the Crimean Tatars but also the Turkic people and Muslim communities around the world.

Starting in the fifteenth century, Crimean Tatars under the rule of Geray Khan's dynasty were allies of the Ottoman Empire and were a self-governing people under the empire's protection. Together with the decline of the Ottoman Empire in the eighteenth century, Crimean Tatars lost power. Military losses against Russia during the war of 1769–1774 left them under the oppressive rule of Russia. Crimean Tatars during this time lived under the hegemony of an invading state and were persecuted in their cultural and religious lives. A great number of Crimean Tatars found a solution by immigrating to the Ottoman lands, but many of these refugees perished during the perilous journeys they took in search of a better life. The ones that stayed lived through a century of social, economic, religious, and cultural decadence. İsmail Gaspıralı was born into this climate and was educated in both the Islamic madrassas in Crimea and Russian schools in Moscow. At a young age he had the privilege of visiting many European cities and his observations helped him develop a broad perspective. Witnessing the decay and backwardness in his own county as well as in the other Muslim countries, he developed



اسماعيل بك غاسپرينسكى
Исмаи́лъ бе́къ Га́спринскі́й.

the “Usul-i Cedid” (New Method) in education, which proposed the inclusion of subjects such as mathematics, history, and geography into the curriculum. He also advocated the phonetic teaching of Arabic even though the traditionalist intellectuals and religious leaders were not pleased with these changes. Gaspıralı published a bilingual Russian-Turkish newspaper named *Tercüman* (The Interpreter) to transmit his ideas to intellectuals in different Muslim countries and summarized his aim in the motto “unity in language, idea, and work.” He believed that using a common Turkic language was crucial in establishing unity among Russian Muslims. Parallel to the political and cultural awakening that was taking place among Ottoman intellectuals toward the end of the nineteenth century, Turkish enlightenment in Russia, kindled by Gaspıralı, promoted reforms in religion and the modernization of Muslim society.

Gaspıralı wrote one of the most important examples of Turkish utopian literature, *Darürrahat Müslümanları* (Muslims of the Peaceful Country).¹ It was published in *Tercüman* in installments during the 1890s and later was published in book form in 1906. The following excerpts are a translation of the earlier text, which was translated from Ottoman Turkish into modern Turkish by Hüseyin Gültekin.² In this narrative, the main character, Molla Abbas of Turkistan, travels to Andalusia in order to visit the greatest works of Islamic civilization and finds himself in an unknown country that can only be reached through underground tunnels. In this place, the peaceful country of Darürrahat, Muslims have created a social system without class differences in a completely self-sufficient manner utilizing science and technology together with religion. Reflecting the anxieties of Gaspıralı’s time, the utopia underlined his hopes for a better life for the Muslim people. Harkening back to the Golden Age of Muslim civilization in Andalusia, he imagined a place where education, science, belief, social justice, and the roles and rights of women in society were drastically different from the world in which he lived. In a literary conceit, the author presents himself as the publisher of a travel narrative titled “Letters from Europe” in *Tercüman*, which follows the viewpoint of a naïve, wide-eyed young student, Molla Abbas, whose good-natured ignorance is constantly emphasized. Although the young Molla Abbas is considered to be an educated man

in his own country, he cannot escape Gaspıralı's satirical views on education and the state of scholars in the Muslim countries.

First Excerpt

Peaceful and Strange Land of Islam

(Work of Abbas Fransovi)

This story is the epilogue to Molla Abbas Efendi's (from Tashkent) travel narrative called "Letters from Europe," which was published in *Tercüman*.³ Leaving the travel to Europe and the commentary on Europe out, here we are presenting the epilogue of this work to our customers in the lands of the Ottomans.

Since it is evident that brilliant ideas and a polite form of writing are not to be expected from a coarse Turk, there is no need to request forgiveness of the faults to be found in the diction of the story.

Abbas Efendi is a student who received his education in Tashkent madrassas and went to Europe in order to visit "Gül Baba" in Tekriya and "Forty Saints" in France. After staying in France for a couple of years he continues his visit to Andalusia.

-The Publisher

In the year of 1880, forty-three hours after leaving Paris, I arrived at the Spanish border. At the last stop the customs officials checked my belongings, as is the custom and the rule. One of them took a careful look at me and said:

"Are you a Moorish Arab?"

"No, sir, I am the son of a Tatar from Tashkent."

"I see . . . from the land of Turkistan . . . where are you going?"

"To Spain, sir."

"Are you a merchant?"

"No, sir, a humble visitor."

"What are you visiting in our country?"

"Praise Allah, sir, your country is considered a holy land for us. We call it the Land of Andalusia; this country which cultivated the most

pleasant Islamic civilization is very famous and always worthy of a visit.”

“Yes, sir, . . . there are many Islamic works to see. Welcome. On the trains it is not possible to stop very often. If you have time I would like to have you as my guest. . . . We don’t get many Tartars here from Turkistan. . . . You are a unique guest. . . .”

I enjoyed these kind words from the Spaniard and realized that they also are well educated like the French. Besides, these two peoples are brothers, their types and languages are similar and they share the same beliefs. However these French and Spanish people had great wars between themselves and cut the throats of each other similar to the Karabag people killing the Badkubelis and the Bukharans killing the Hokants.⁴ They are also likely to continue cutting each other’s throats! Since I knew French, I was able to communicate with the Spanish, and after reading travel writings I quickly gathered some information on the country. Anybody with any knowledge of the French language can communicate in every country in Europe. Many people, even the servants of big hostels, speak French.

The city that I stayed in was the capital city, Madrid. I continued my visits from this city. Spain is a country of sixteen million people but it cannot be compared to France in this respect. This must be because of its southern location. However, the regulations of the government and the customs show that it is a European country. They are a very open and happy people, they are very enthusiastic about dancing and musical instruments, but, still, they are more religious than the French. They show immense respect toward their religion and their sanctuaries.

As it stands, Spain is one of the secondary governments. Comparatively speaking, the people cannot be considered wealthy. In the past the American continent and some large islands belonged to Spain and at that time shiploads of gold were coming into the country. American savages⁵ would give a handful of gold and silver in return for a small rifle made out of glass. Yet those times have passed and America and the islands formed their separate states. All the gold and silver were spent and gone. Lack of proper skills and unemployment brought neediness and desperation. Spain is a great example and a lesson for everyone:

wealth comes from work and skills, not from easy gold. A country full of gold was finished, but on the other hand the English land without any gold became the fortune of the world thanks to its people's abilities and hard work! Spaniards ended up hungry like the prodigal people. Busybody Brits, on the other hand, dominated everybody and gathered the whole world's property.

Spain is a peninsula on the southern part of the European continent. It is surrounded by the Atlantic Ocean to the west and the Mediterranean Sea to the south. The water and air there are truly wonderful. They have plenty of grapevines, figs, pomegranates, lemon and orange orchards. Although some of the cities lack water and are somewhat desert-like, the majority of the country is quite fertile and fruitful. In between the African Islamic countries and Morocco and Spain stands the Strait of Gibraltar. Islamic warriors crossed this strait to conquer Andalusia.

In the year 84, according to the Muslim calendar [the year 668 in the Gregorian calendar], during the time of Caliph Velid bin Abdulmelik, the north side of the African continent up to the Atlantic Ocean was conquered and the people living there made the acquaintance of honorable Islam. Musa ibn Nusayr was among the Arab commanders who crossed the strait and spread the religion of Islam even into Andalusia. At that time the Christian governments were against each other because of treachery and defeat; there were many among them who wanted Muslims to come and conquer their land. That's why Musa ibn Nusayr asked for the caliph's permission to make an expedition to the Andalusian continent. He wrote that Andalusia was like Damascus in grace, like Yemen in climate and water, and like India in terms of its minerals.

After taking Spain, Commander Musa ibn Nusayr wanted to conquer the French and German lands. And after taking the whole of Europe under siege, he wanted to come to Istanbul. That's why, gathering the necessary equipment in the first half of the year 93 [711], Barbary Governor Musa ibn Nusayr appointed Tarik ibn Ziyad as commander to lead the Andalusian conquest. In a short while, a handful of Islam's warriors conquered the whole land and many fortresses, destroying the

Christian governments. However, some governments in the open country and on the mountains accepted paying taxes in return for their freedom. Apart from the perseverance and bravery of Islam, the justice and fairness demonstrated in the lands that were conquered made the Christians submit to Islamic rule and obey quite easily. For instance, the conquest of Sevilla was made possible after the Christians' comfort and peace in the conquered city of Toledo had been observed.

As soon as he received the news of Tarik ibn Ziyad's conquests and works, Barbary Governor Musa ibn Nusayr rounded up a legion of soldiers and conquered many other places in Andalusia, yet in reality Tarik was the true conqueror. Since Tarik became well known for his knowledge and talent for fighting and his fairness in administration, Musa became resentful and jealous. He wrote various accusations about Tarik in a letter to the caliph and they were both invited to Damascus for investigation. Musa defended himself deceitfully and Tarik ibn Ziyad was forced to leave his position. This well-known conqueror died in 97 [716] in desolate conditions in Andalusia.

In the year 113 [731–732], Muslims crossed the Pyrenees and attacked France. Conquering Toulouse and Bordeaux, they came all the way to the city of Tours. However, because they were too far away from Andalusia and couldn't receive the necessary help, the soldiers became weak. Also, French soldiers under the commanders Charles Martel and Kuledos attacked the Muslims. In the battle around the city of Poitiers Muslims lost and had to retreat to Andalusia. I came to France knowing that the Forty Saints pilgrimage was close to this city of Poitiers, yet I couldn't find the said area since time has passed and no signs of the Forty Saints have survived.

The continent of Andalusia was subject to the Damascus caliphs and was run by the appointed governors. But at the time the Damascus Caliphate collapsed and the caliphate was passed down from the Omayyad dynasty to the Abbasids. Abdurrahman from the Omayyad dynasty ran away to Andalusia in the year 140 [683–84] and was received respectfully as a caliph by the people of Andalusia. The Islamic government in Andalusia started with this Abdurrahman Caliphate and continued until 895 [1489–90].

The Islamic government in Andalusia, in its time, was one of the foremost in the world with respect to its science, ability, and governing style. Furthermore, it was superior to all governments because of the strength of the army, the brilliance of its knowledge, its general culture, and advanced economy. The civility and good harmony of the people in the Andalusian Islamic country became a model and a lesson for European people. The majority of the wisdom and science of European scholars was received in Andalusian madrassas. Just as the disunity and disorder among the Christians caused the conquest of Andalusia and the success of the Muslims, disorder among the people of Islam and the unity and perseverance in Christian minds caused the collapse of the Andalusian state. Ferdinand took Andalusia from the Muslims and the last *amir* was Mevla Ebu Abdullahu's-Sagir. After months under siege, Ebu Abdullah surrendered the fortress at Granada to Ferdinand and retreated to Maghreb. Spanish soldiers entered the city as Ferdinand and his wife Isabel sat on their thrones in Alhambra Palace. This was the end of the Andalusian state.

When the continent of Andalusia fell into the hands of the Muslims, it was a fertile country with fair weather, but because of the lack of civilization and lack of talent among its people, it was broken down and empty. Yet with the effort, perseverance, and good management of the sons of Arabs, the whole country was full of fruits and people in no time. As a result of the intelligence and civilization, roads and bridges were built everywhere. Fountains on the roads, wells in the desert areas, thousands of mills near water, factories, villages, towns, and cities were also built. Deserts turned into orchards and gardens, wilderness turned into farms. They brought water to places where it was deemed impossible before; they gave new life to the arid soil. As a result of their efforts, perseverance, and skills, the people of Islam became fruitful and developed day by day and turned Andalusia into a paradise. As seen in Arab history, alongside Vadi-i Kebir (Grand Valley), twelve thousand villages were built. During the time of Amir Yusuf, every Friday *khutbahs* (sermons) were given in his honor in three hundred thousand *minbars* (pulpits)! There were eighty large towns and three hundred cities. In the sultanate city of Córdoba were two hundred thousand houses, six hundred

mosques, five hundred hospitals, eight hundred madrassas, and nine hundred baths! The cities of Granada, Toledo, and Seville were also at the level of Córdoba. The Islamic civilization that was the result of great effort and talent should be evaluated according to these. This should demonstrate the Andalusian Muslims' enlightened and happy lives. Thanks to the intelligent and fair rule of the Andalusian Caliphate, they were more advanced than all of the European and Asian countries. As explained in the European histories, the treasures of the caliph were more than the total of the European governments' treasures. The wealth of the government comes from the wealth of its people. The wealth of the people comes from good management, skills, industry, and effort. The education and dissemination of science and wisdom are the reason and the result of this wealth. There have never been as many wise men in another country as we see in Andalusia. There is a list of two hundred three scholars who became famous with their scientific works. Some of them wrote one hundred books, the total number of works by them exceeds one thousand. Unfortunately, during the collapse of the Andalusian state these books fell in the hands of Spanish Christians. At that time they were very conservative and not appreciative of science. They burned whole libraries, saying that these were "the works of Islam and the works of the enemy!" The Muslims of Andalusia showed great improvements in medicine, surgery, pharmacy, ontology, mathematics, geometry, astronomy, and logic. The caliphs paid large amounts of money for one book and spent fortunes on scholars, summoning them from many different countries through the ambassadors. The palace of the *amir* was also the assembly of scientists and scholars, the general Privy Council! The degree of interest in science and books was obvious in the fact that reverend Abdurrahman-ı Salis built a library in Córdoba with six hundred thousand volumes. There were seventy large libraries in the country that were used by the general public and students. Europeans used to come to Andalusia to study science and acquire skills. That's why Andalusian Muslims contributed greatly to the development of European civilization. We can even say that they were the mentors and masters of Europe. The present works of Islam that survive until today in Spain cause awe and admiration in everyone, making them say "thank God for

these.” If people see Cami-i Kebir, which now has been converted into a church in Córdoba, or Alhambra Palace in Granada, they can understand the extent of the Andalusian civilization. Thank God, I was able to come from Tashkent and see all of these. During my visit I was so pleased with these feelings and sweet dreams. Sometimes my days were spent with bitter tears but as time passed I found comfort and delight in my life.

I stayed in Córdoba for a week, busying myself visiting the mosque. I couldn't get enough of what I saw! The second work of art was “Kas-rül-hamra” (now known as Alhambra Palace) that belonged to the Melik Ibn Ahmer in Granada.

Every year hundreds of people from all over Europe come to visit this palace. Alhambra is composed of layers of quads, many buildings, and partitions. Yet the whole building in general is charming, graceful, and beautiful, as if it came out of the skillful hands of a seasoned master. It is impossible not to be in awe looking at the ornaments carved in marble, shapes decorated with tiny stones! One cannot draw these intricate details with pen on paper, yet these masters carved them in stone! They have stayed intact for five hundred years and there are also some writings and verses of the Koran written in gold and silver in appropriate places. For example, on the gate named Babü's Sara, the inscriptions in *Kûfi* and *Afriki* style state that it was built in 749 [1348–49]. Since the ornaments and embellishments of Alhambra Palace are signs of unique workmanship, European masters always come here to learn the techniques.

During my first visit to Alhambra I took a guide with me. I talked to the warden of the palace and got permission to visit. I was feeling admiration and awe as I walked around. Even though the building gave me comfort, the hidden message of “past times will never come back” was mixing the bitter poison with sweet honey. I told the officers of the palace that I came from Turkistan and they granted me permission to visit the palace anytime I wanted. I spent a month visiting Alhambra, mostly during the days and some nights. I saw every corner of it. Sometimes during the dawn, under the light of the moon, I would walk through the sections and the courtyards.

According to Arab history, the climate, location, and the water of Granada cannot be compared to Damascus or Baghdad since it is a unique

corner of the world. They say, "Water stops the heat of the sun." No matter how hot this summer sun is in Granada, it rains a lot and cools the weather down because it is surrounded by the Sierra Nevada, which are always snowy and icy on top. When it is hot, the water coming down from the mountains counteracts the heat of the sun. That's why the city of Granada is a fruitful and fertile place; you can find all kinds of fruits and roses.

Close to Alhambra Palace there used to be a secondary palace located inside a big garden. The caliphs used to reside here at times. Spanish people call this place "Ceneralif." In Arabic it is called Cennetü'l-arif, so we can call Granada paradise on earth. I spent a month in Granada watching the scenery, contemplating on the path, full of emotion and various kinds of sadness.

One day, instead of going back to the city, I decided to stay in the palace. I walked around the palace until the evening and prayed. Since it was summer and there was moonlight, I decided to sleep on my prayer rug where I performed the *salaat* every day in the place called Lions' Square. There was a great fountain in the middle of this square. It had eight lions made out of marble and water used to come out of the lions' mouths. Even though nowadays the fountain is dry, under the moonlight it looked very graceful and impressive, so I sat down to admire it. As I imagined and reveled in the fantasy of the people in the palace, European ambassadors, wise men, and scholars of Islam walking around in this courtyard during the time of the caliphate, I heard quiet human voices and footsteps from the nearby Gülbahçe (rose garden) courtyard. The night was so calm that you could hear a fly. Who are these people? Palace attendants were away from this area; they wouldn't admit anybody into the palace at night. As for me, some days, instead of going back to the city, I stayed in the palace, purchasing food and water from these attendants. As the noise came closer to me, I crouched in a quiet and shadowy corner waiting in fear and shock. By God, what was this! Twelve beautiful girls came out of Gülbahçe courtyard into the Lions' Square! My God, what was this? I froze.

The girls lined up around the fountain and one of them started praying. After the prayer they retreated to Gülbahçe, where they had come from. . . .⁶ My eyes were seeing but I couldn't believe them. The court-

yard was as quiet as a graveyard. In the name of God, I got up from my place and, quietly stepping on the marble stones, started to follow them to see where they were coming from and where they were going.

Walking around Gülbahçe courtyard, the girls entered the Harem Mansion one by one. . . . The air was quiet and the world was fast asleep. The moonlight was shining coyly. Walking on tiptoes, I entered the mansion, following the girls. When I went into the second section, they saw me and scattered around, saying, "Oh my God, who is this person? A European!" I was scared too, but I collected myself and I said, "No, sisters, I am not foreign, I am a Muslim. . . . Don't be scared. . . . By God, I don't know how and why I came to this place, it is just a coincidence." They calmed down a little and looked at each other. At that moment, one of the marble stones on the floor moved and a turban popped out. . . . I was so shocked that I didn't know what to do. What strange things are these? It has been five hundred years since the end of the caliphate and no one lived in this place since then! Who are these girls, what is this turban? The turban was on the head of an old and sage Arab. As he came out of the ground the girls pointed toward me. After looking at me with his full attention, the old Arab said:

"God bless you, son, are you Molla Abbas?"

"Yes, Father, I am Abbas." When I looked at him carefully, I noticed that this old Arab was Sheikh Celal, whom I knew in Paris. "By God, Sheikh Father, my mind doesn't grasp all this," I said.

"Son, you have so much to see, be patient, you will understand. . . . Come close to me."

I walked to the middle of the section. The girls were eyeing me from head to toe. Sheikh Celal pointed at the hole in the ground and told me to "jump in there." Sensing my fear and hesitation, he added, "Don't be scared, the girls and I will jump down, too." What could I do? . . . I let myself go as if falling into my grave. My feet soon touched a stone staircase. I descended thirty or forty steps. . . . There was such a darkness that is impossible to find on earth. My head was full of ideas and my heart was full of fear. Where am I going? Why am I going? What is going to happen to me? My God! As soon as I got my head together, I noticed a red light on the top of the staircase. I heard footsteps. I saw that they

were coming. The light was coming from a torch; Sheikh Celal and the girls descended one by one, carrying torches.

“Don’t be afraid, son, walk. There is only one road, you can’t get lost,” said the sheikh and we went down forty more steps into either a section with a stone-ornamented arch or a dungeon. . . . Sheikh Celal opened the hole in the wall by removing two cut stones. . . . The girls went through that hole one by one. He told me to go through and hold the light. Then he himself came to the other side and closed the hole. From here we climbed up ten steps. Another big section! The girls spread their prayer rugs and started their morning prayers. . . . Since I was in shock at all of the things that happened, I didn’t know what to think! Although Sheikh Celal was a friend of mine from Paris, I was sure of my anxiety and fear. . . . We are going underground, but where? . . . I meant to ask them but I couldn’t find the time.

The second section that we were in was also built of stone. On the top of the stone staircase there was a pile of dirt. Sheikh Celal started to push down the dirt with the shovel that was waiting there. I also helped him with his task. In a short time we closed the entrance to the staircase through which we had passed. The road that we had traveled was completely closed! If somebody upstairs found the first staircase coming down they could find the first section, however it would be impossible to go through and find the road after that! After the prayers the girls sat on the floor. One of them took the basket hanging on the wall and put the fruit and bread in front of her friends. They gave us some fruit as well. . . . They ate, prayed, and talked like people. . . . They were definitely people, but what kind of people! I ate a couple of peaches, the kind of which I have never seen in the world. I couldn’t hide my curiosity and asked Sheikh Celal:

“Sheikh, I saw that we went underground; yet tell me, where is this strange road leading? It is obvious where you get if you ride the camels in Turkistan or if you ride the trains in Europe. I cannot comprehend the road that I fell onto!”

“Yes, son, it is a curious road, I am sure you have never seen one like this. Be patient. . . . The section that we descended through eighty steps was the treasury in the times of the caliphate. It contained the most valu-

able goods and gold of the Andalusian caliphs. . . . This second section is called Bab-ı Selâmet (Gate of Salvation). Nobody on earth knows this place. Only a few people can have the honor.”

Even though Sheikh Celal explained that the second section is called the Gate of Salvation, I was still anxious because I didn't know where we were going. I said, “Thank you for the explanation, but, for the sake of God, tell me, where are we going? . . . I am full of respect toward you, but I am losing my mind because of astonishment and curiosity!”

“Don't be alarmed, my son, trust us. These girls are also trustworthy and respect-worthy people. Don't bring fearful things to your mind. . . . This dark road will lead us to an enlightened land.”

“My God, am I going crazy? How is this possible? An enlightened land under the earth. . . . I studied geography and geology, but a place like this. . . .” In the meantime, the girls got ready for the road and waited for the sheikh's orders.

“You will soon know the world that you didn't know before. . . . When we come out of this darkness, Feride Banu (that is the name of one of the girls) will explain the history of this land and you'll understand the past. . . . Be free of fear and anxiety. . . . We can't talk too much right now because we are underground; the air is spare and foul. We need to get out quickly. We don't want to faint in this darkness,” said the sheikh, pointing the way. From the Bab-ı Selâmet section there was a straight tunnel. The girls started walking two by two, holding their torches. We followed them on the stone-paved road. Some areas were very damp with dripping water. We walked for two hours without stopping. My feet started to give in, but suddenly, thank God, a white light appeared. The girls started running while saying, “*Allahu ekber, Allahu ekber.*”

I looked around as we came out of the darkness. The light of the world was there. Oh my God, I thought we came out to the face of the earth, but I noticed that we were in a well. I don't know what to call it if not a well. The length and the width of the place were almost eighty meters and surrounded by rocks and stones. When I looked up I saw a little piece of the sky. Thank goodness for that! We were on earth! I was thankful like a man who woke up from a terrible nightmare; then again

the place we were in was a waterless well about two hundred meters deep. Yet, with its air and light, it was still showing signs that we were on earth.

The girls sat on rocks and rested while Sheikh Celal performed his morning prayers. I followed his lead. Thinking that it would be inappropriate to ask further questions, I decided to be patient. Yet curiosity and bewilderment were still burning in me. My God, what else was going to happen to me? Being an understanding and compassionate person, Sheikh Celal talked to me after his prayers: "My son, you will soon be reaching a happy community. . . . Look at the bottom of this mountain across the way, there is a dark road again. If we walk on that road for fifteen minutes, we will find ourselves in Darürrahat."

"Tell me, Sheikh, is this country in this world? I am getting confused."

"Yes, son, it is in this world, yet none of the historians or geographers of the East or the West know this place."

"By God! Darürrahat is on the Spanish continent. We are three to four hours away from Granada. It doesn't make sense. Nowadays the furthest corners of the world are known, calculated, planned, and charted. The fauna and flora and the people are cataloged. There is a country underground, close to the city of Granada in Spain, and nobody knows about it. I cannot quite comprehend it!"

"Don't stress your mind. We will describe it to you, be patient, son."

After these words, the sheikh called the girls to his side and introduced us.

"Don't be shy around this person, he is a Muslim from Turkistan, his name is Abbas. Even though lately the people of Islam, just like the people of Europe, are in a sea of darkness and carelessness, there are some scientific steps being taken and some knowledge is taught there. There are some Muslim scholars that study, more or less, and are considered wise men. This man, Abbas Efendi, is a man highly educated in Tashkent and then in Paris. So I hope he can comprehend our situation here. . . . Try not to see his mistakes, forgive his tactlessness, and follow your conscience. . . . I hope that he will try to join the Islamic civilization and community and be a worthy person. He will see what he hasn't seen, he will know what he has not known, his mind will clear. . . ."

Even though I received education in Tashkent and became acquainted with the new sciences in Paris, the fact that this reverent sheikh looked at me and introduced me to these girls as “an ignorant and uncivilized person” bothered me very much, but what could I do? I studied grammar, logic, Islamic theology, geography, history, chemistry, philosophy, geometry, calculus, and other sciences. I was thinking that if I went to Turkistan I would be considered a first-rate scholar, but here they look at me as a child learning his alphabet! What strange people! My God, give me patience! Then the reverent sheikh said to me:

“These girls are students of a madrassa. This year they completed their education by getting the honor of being top students in their exams. According to the old tradition of our land, they were visiting the old Andalusia, Granada and Alhambra Palace, as an award. . . . To see the holy land that housed our ancestors for five hundred years is a sweet delight for all of us, but only a few can have the honor. . . . From the girls’ mansion where we descended it is possible to see the whole of Granada and most of sacred Andalusia. . . . That is what these girls were doing when you ran into them. We have never had a visitor before; there is no road and the road that you saw is not known. . . . So, welcome, son, let it be good for you and for all of us. . . . The people you will see are human beings, but they are different from the people that you know. They are all Muslims, but they are not like the ones in Turkistan, Egypt, India, or Iran. You will see for yourself. . . . You know a little bit of Arabic, you can talk to the girls. Your lack of language will not be a problem, the scholars will understand whatever you say. Also, we can see your ideas and intentions from the way you look, the way you walk. Try to follow the rules of general morality, manners, and compassion. . . . Feride Banu will give you information about the place to where we are heading so that you know what kind of a country you fell into.”

After the sheikh said these words, the girls introduced themselves to me and expressed pleasantries. To introduce myself and the fame of Turkistan, I composed a few lines of poetry praising the beauty of their faces and expressing my happiness. The girls listened to me while looking at each other. One of them said, “This must be the custom in Turkistan.”

We rested for a while in this place, call it the bottom of a well or in between mountains, then we took to the road. Our road was the tunnel dug in the mountain across the way. When the girls entered the tunnel the torches that they held started burning. . . . I had not noticed it until this point, the torches were burning on their own, they didn't have any kindling, gas, or oil in them. To my surprise, these torches were full of electric power and were built in a way that has never been seen in our world! Looking at these torches, I realized that these people and their land that we were going to was not behind and possibly ahead of Europe in terms of philosophy, mechanics, and skills, even though they do not have any connection or communication with Europe. . . . Strange! What else will I see?

We walked underground in the dark for half an hour. Then we came to a section that is similar to the section I mentioned at the beginning of our journey. This was also a cave carved out of stone. As soon as we all went in Sheikh Celal said, "We are going to Darürrahat right now. It is a rule that no one should know the road and gates as we go there. We have to blindfold everyone." The girls used their head covers to cover their eyes and I used my oil cloth. . . . Sheikh Celal moved to a corner of the section and made noises indicating he was opening a door and putting a rock on the ground. . . . I didn't see anything. . . . After that he came close to us, made the girls hold hands and, holding my hand with one of his hands and holding a girl's hand with his other hand, told us to walk slowly, following each other. . . . We walked with the guidance of the sheikh. For a few steps we turned one direction; at the end we walked uphill a long way in the tunnel. . . . "Watch out, there's a staircase in front of you," he said. We went up twenty steps. . . . "Now we have arrived," said Sheikh Celal. . . . "We arrived safe and sound," he said to somebody I didn't know. . . . A gate was open and a pleasant breeze came in. . . . We walked again, blindfolded. I don't know the places we passed, but we stopped. . . . There was a fountain or a river. From the fragrances around me I realized that we were on the face of the earth. On one hand I was anxious and fearful, on the other hand I was very curious to see where we were. My mind was so confused that I cannot describe my situation with words! "We are here; welcome, remove your blindfolds,"

said the sheikh. . . . I pulled the oil cloth from my face and looked at the world to find myself in a large room decorated according to Islamic customs. There was sunlight coming in from the windows and I heard the water from the fountain. . . . Two old Arabs that looked like Sheikh Celal in terms of their age and clothing were standing next to the fountain with face cloths in their hands. . . . The girls dropped their head covers right away and started twittering like nightingales. They ran to the fountain, drank some water, and washed their faces. . . .

One of the old Arab started asking questions of the girls: "Did you travel safely, did our old Granada look pleasant, and how is the old country?" And the girls talked about what they saw and how much they enjoyed everything.

As for myself, I didn't know who I was or where I was due to my state of desperation and confusion. Thank God, Sheikh Celal paid attention to me: ". . . Come here, son, wash your face, it will refresh you if you are tired."

Nevertheless, after the wash my mind was quite calmed. The girls went into the second section and the sheikh and I followed. There we saw that a table was set and a meal prepared for all of us. Around this room there were soft red leather cushions. We ate the meat, rice, and many kinds of fruits and retired to the cushions. The two aforementioned old Arabs swept the room according to Islamic custom and left. . . . As I looked outside through the window next to me, my admiration increased! A divine, spacious green area. . . . Surrounded on all sides by forested mountains. . . . The highest tops of the mountains were ornamented with snow and ice and looked like silver jewelry. We were in a heavenly meadow surrounded by snowy mountains. When I took my eyes away from the mountains and looked at the land, I saw that it was divided into gardens, vineyards, rose gardens, and among them silver waters were running. Among the gardens, stone-house villages and Arabic-style narrow minarets reaching up to the sky created such a picture that the skill of my pen wasn't adequate to describe! I just kept staring at this country! Zerefsan in Turkistan, Paris in Europe are very nice and beautiful places, but Darürrahat was more beautiful than both of them.

I asked Feride, who was nearby, about the size of this country. She said, "If we want to say it according to your Turkistan calculations, the length is three hours and the width is two hours."

Then I said, "I beg you, tell me the real history of this beautiful and strange country, I am burning in the fires of curiosity and eagerness." I looked at the girls with utmost attention and I noticed that the majority of these girls were beautiful. . . .

As Feride prepared herself to speak we all got ready to listen. Because, according to the customs of this country, if a wise man or a wise woman is going to give a lesson or tell history, he or she has to be loyal to the real events and tell the story in a proper literary style. Feride Hanim started talking. . . .

Translator's Summary

Feride proceeds to tell the history of Darürrahat in a way expected of an educated woman. After describing the impressive civilization built by Muslim ancestors in Andalusia, she continues to tell the reasons behind the decline of this great civilization. In 1491, when King Ferdinand of Spain and his wife Isabel come to invade the city, Caliph Abdullah es-Sagir is unable to demonstrate the necessary leadership and the courage to save the city. One of the commanders, Musa bin Ebü'l-Gazani, argues for defending the city but cannot convince the assembly. One hundred thirty of Musa's followers and relatives take to the underground tunnel dug years before for a possible invasion but had been forgotten over time. They reach the place where they will build Darürrahat and bring with them the necessary equipment, books, and the desire to form a modern, advanced Islamic civilization. Molla Abbas wants to know more about this strange land and Sheikh Celal functions as his mentor.

Second Excerpt

Even though it wasn't too late, the sun was getting ready to go down behind the mountains. Since Darürrahat was surrounded by huge mountains on all sides, during the time of mid-afternoon, two hours before

the evening, the sun disappears, leaving this strange country in shadows.

We were very well rested after our underground voyage and decided to get on our way toward the city before it was completely dark. After everyone was out of the place we were staying to rest, the doors were locked.

This place was a guard station and the beginning of the underground road. As we left this place we found ourselves in a beautiful meadow. The girls walked in front of us toward the village, talking to each other. The sheikh and I followed them with difficulty.

When we came to the said village, I noticed that it had a style of building that had never been seen before. It had a circular, large open space paved with crushed material. There was no sign of dust, mud, or trash. In the middle of the circle was a large stone mosque and on one side of this mosque was a madrassa, and on the other side the assembly place and the great hall. . . . Around the mosque were old date trees, and around the circle there were orchards and gardens. In these gardens they had built houses that had the same exact distance to each other and the mosque. Obviously they were built according to a certain order and calculation. They stood beautifully inside the garden facing the mosque and the circle. When I paid attention to the buildings in this village, I noticed a very curious thing. Other than the mosque, none of these buildings reached all the way to the ground like what we normally see. They were all built on a stone belt, one *archine* (Turkish yard) high off the ground. It seemed as if all the houses were suspended in air. When I inquired about this situation, Sheikh Celal said:

“Listen, son, just like our spiritual lives and morals should be built on God’s word and Islamic rules, our physical world should be suitable to the law of the instruments. In the nature of things there are harms and benefits to people. We need to know these, and while escaping one we need to invite and use the other. . . . Underground and in meadows like our country there is plenty of water, hence a lot of moisture. The plants and metals rotting in the soil transform from one form to another, creating poison for human beings and causing pain and various illnesses.

That is why we don't build houses on ground level. We build them over stone poles or belts so that the bottom of the house allows the movement of the air and the poisonous spirits and moisture cannot come inside our homes. . . ." I was very surprised to hear these words from the sheikh. He continued, "My son, during our migration our country was full of reeds, swamps, and had foul air. The immigrants suffered unending diseases and unpleasant ailments. Our wise men and the leaders paid attention to this problem, understood the reason for these diseases, and even discovered the solutions. They dug channels to help run the water off and dried up the swamps. They got rid of the reeds and rotten plants along the waterway, brought fresh water from the mountains, and built fountains. As soon as the water and air were clean, the community became healthy and comfortable. Presently there are virtually no illnesses in Darürrahat. . . . I realized that you are in awe, you are wondering how this is possible. Son, I am sorry but I have to call you ignorant! You have no idea about anything. In time you will understand. . . . All the graces of God are great but the greatest of all is the intelligence that God gave to human beings. With the power of intelligence you can go across oceans, discover riches hidden underground. You can also find solutions for many aches, pains, and illnesses. However, the will is only God's, human beings are only instruments. Nevertheless, the intelligence enlightened by knowledge and refinement is a joy and happiness for people."

We all arrived at the assembly hall in the circle. It was a building with three to five rooms built in the style of Andalusia. Two of the rooms were separated from each other by a glass wall and they were pleasantly decorated. We sat in one and the girls retired to the other one. At that time the old and wise imam of the village and the men who recite the *azan* came by. Since they had never seen people from other countries, they focused their utmost attention on me. However, because they were very well mannered they tried to hide their attention and curiosity. Sheikh Celal told them the coincidence of our meeting at Alhambra Palace and said that it was better to bring the man who has seen the secret road than to leave him there. He also added that he knew me from Paris and that I was a Muslim.

The imam of the village, after some pleasantries, asked me questions about Tashkent, Bukhara, and Turkistan.

“They say the land of Bukhara is an honorable country with its science and knowledge. Rumor has it that it is a garden of wisdom. . . . I wonder about the organization of the madrassas and whether all of the sciences are taught there?”

I told him all I knew about the style and structure of education in Bukhara and Turkistan. The old imam shook his head:

“Strange! Don’t you need doctors, chemists, architects, and engineers in your area? Don’t your leaders and governments need public management, accounting, and skillful clerks to run the government? According to what you say, in your madrassas there are no sciences other than the science of theology. They do not teach medicine, geometry, chemistry, natural sciences, economy, and they do not educate people other than spiritual training. Is that so?”

“Yes, sir. They do not teach any other sciences except for religion and Islamic law.”

“Thank God that you are not deprived of theology! How can you live in this world without any refinement and knowledge of various sciences? Such a strange situation! How can your governments manage and protect themselves? Why have the refinements and knowledge, the education of all sciences, been abandoned? In the old Islam there was a great effort shown in these areas.”

“They say refinement and knowledge cause corruption, sir.”

“What a shame, what a horrible oversight! Son, can a person walk blindfolded? You do not know about the soil but you try to plant; you don’t know the water but you drink it; you don’t know the world but you live your life in this world. . . . Such a shame, such a neglect! May God give you reason! I am extremely sad about your situation. Ordinary people might not know this, but don’t the elite people, educated people, nobles know it? There is a need to learn the religious duties, but training soldiers, discovering new medicine and solutions, governing people require other sciences and refinements. Some sciences are for religion, some sciences are for life, some sciences are for spirit, and some sciences are for body. . . . What a pity that in our time Muslims

are not at the highest level. You are not going to see that in this country.”

“I think the lifestyle and advancements that I will see in Darürrahat will be far ahead of Europe.”

“You shouldn’t take any offense, son. Hopefully, one day the people of Turkistan will be aware of sciences and refinements and get on the road to progress. . . . Ignorance and neglect are big and difficult problems to overcome, but they will pass. Even if you don’t have the education and refinements, the public in general has the initial education that is reading and writing. The first step of knowledge is reading and writing.”

“No, sir. Maybe half of the public knows how to read. Only ten percent of the people can write.”

“Can this be true? Are you mistaken, son?”

“No, sir. This is our situation!”

“If this is the case you are quite doomed. You said that theology is taught there. Don’t you know that reading, writing, and science are the duties of all Muslim men and women? If you all know this, why do you fail to perform it? I can’t wrap my mind around this! Ignoring refinements, ignoring education, what a strange land!”

Translator’s Summary and Conclusion

In Darürrahat Abbas is confronted with many new inventions, a surprisingly organized society, advanced engineering and architecture, higher levels of education for both sexes, a different type of leadership and justice system. The people of Darürrahat organize every segment of their lives according to rational principles without contradicting the principles of religion. After spending one month in Darürrahat, Abbas wants to leave in order to continue his pilgrimage. At the end of the narrative he finds himself in a hospital in Granada and questions if everything he had experienced was a dream, only to realize that Darürrahat was real.

Utopian narratives address the social problems and shortcomings of the time and the society in which they are written. In his utopia, Gaspıralı points out the major problems in Muslim communities as

being a lack of education in sciences, technology, women's rights, and progress, and offers his solutions through the ironic voice of Molla Abbas.

Notes

¹The full English translation of Gaspıralı's *Darürrahat Müslümanları* will be published soon.

²Gültekin, Hüseyin, translator. "Darürrahat Müslümanları." *Türk Ütopyaları: Tanzimat'tan Cumhuriyet'e Ütopya ve Devrim*, edited by Sadık Usta, Kaynak Yayınları, 2014.

³This text was serialized in the 1890s in *Tercüman* by İsmail Gaspıralı. In 1906 he published a book titled *Darürrahat Müslümanları* and based on these texts. This translation is of the serialized version.

⁴Gaspıralı points out the conflicts between the Khans of Karadag-Baku in the Caucasus and Bukhara-Hokant (Fergana) in Turkistan.

⁵The word "savages" here is used as the direct translation of the words "vahşiler ve yabaniler" in the original text.

⁶Editor's note: The frequent ellipses are a literary device used in the original text to indicate pauses.