



BRILL

Pure Soul in Unclean body: Some Remarks on Christian-Islamic Divergences

Angeliki Konstantakopoulou

University of Ioannina

aconstan@uoi.gr

Abstract

In this paper we analyse, on a transcendental and material basis, religious admonitions and priorities pertaining to the soul's purity and the body's (un)cleanness as constituents of dominant or challenging world views and behavioural systems. They are approached as a complex and historically determined social topic rather than as a simply cultural one. Explanations are also attempted regarding the differing Christian and Islamic soul-body perceptions and the syncretistic practices in the late-medieval Balkans, when Christian (Hesychasm) and Islamic mystic versions were widely diffused. Finally, we trace the religious imprint of relevant corporeal stances in today societies.

Keywords

Hesychasm – Islam – soul – body – religious corporeality – baths – Byzantium – Bulgaria – Serbia

As the title implies, our investigation emphasizes two religious seemingly divergent dimensions of the human being, the transcendental and the material. This structural ideological division, underlying the platonic idea of *mimesis*, adjusted to the neoplatonic Christian context, defines norms and commands, social and gender behavioural practices (everyday work and feasts, earthly/after-death life worldviews) which, manifested corporeally, acquire an uncontested materiality, while at the same time the social choices are naturalized according to the sophisticated analysis by Pierre Bourdieu. Actually, while exploring traditional societies, he views body as a “living-memory vademecum”, a “storehouse where the most precious values are preserved”, thus, showing the dialectic relationship of the “natural-social space”. As he aptly writes,