Turkish tradition

The Turkish language was introduced into Asia Minor/Anatolia by the Seljuk Turks in the eleventh century and later became the official language of the Ottoman Empire (mid-thirteenth to twentieth centuries) and of the republic of Turkey (founded in 1923).

The Seljuk sultanate of Anatolia was an offshoot of the Ilkhanid empire and extended from Iran to Mesopotamia, Syria and Palestine in the eleventh century. The principality had a mixed population of Muslims, Christians, Armenians, Greeks, Syrians, and Iranians; the Turkish element was dominant but tolerant of racial and religious differences. In administration and culture, the sultanate adopted mainly Iranian models and used Persian as the official language.

The Ottoman Empire that eventually grew out of various Anatolian principalities was also multi-ethnic, allowing for a plurality of languages within its boundaries which, at the peak of its power in the sixteenth century, had extended into central Europe in the west, Crimea in the north, and included the Middle East and North Africa. The dismemberment of the Empire after World War One led to the formation of the republic in 1923, in Asia Minor and part of Thrace. The republic retained, on a smaller scale, some of the ethnic/linguistic plurality of the empire. Today, Kurdish is the most widely spoken among the various minority languages, followed by Arabic, Armenian, Ladino and Greek.

Overview of the pre-Ottoman and Ottoman periods (thirteenth to nineteenth centuries)

In the Seljuk state, with Konya as its capital, the official interpreter-translator was known as tercuman (from Arabic tarjaman, of Aramaic origin). The tercuman, or ‘dragoman’ in English, was appointed by royal decree and held in high esteem. Dragomans were in charge of correspondence with foreign states and acted as intermediaries for foreigners and natives in court cases, interpreting for plaintiffs and defendants and referring them to their special clerks. At the time of Alaeddin Keykubad (d.1237) there were two such appointed dragomans and two special translators’ clerks.

The first imperial dragoman mentioned in Ottoman records is Lutfi Bey, who was sent as emissary to Venice in 1479 to deliver a treaty. The position of the official dragoman in the Ottoman state is therefore thought to have been established by Mehmed II (1432–81) after the conquest of Constantinople. Georgios Amirukis (Amirutes in Turkish), who fell captive to Mehmet II following the conquest of the Greek Pontic Empire, is known to have translated for the Sultan in scholarly matters but not in political communications.

Professional translation/interpreting came to be institutionalized in the sixteenth century as the growing diplomatic and commercial activities of the Empire created more demand for professional dragomans. By the eighteenth century, the official function of dragomans was established in four separate areas:

(a) the foreign affairs department of the Imperial Chancery of State, known as the Sublime Porte.
(b) the administration of provinces, where interpreters for law courts were appointed or dismissed on the recommendation of local judges but dragomans served, with a special warrant, as intermediaries in all official matters between the non-Turkish speaking subjects of the empire (who constituted the majority) and the local government.
(c) educational institutions such as the School of Military Engineering, the School of Naval Engineering and the Levent garrison for the training of the Nizam-i Cedid troops, all founded on European models in the late eighteenth century as part of military reforms. Here, dragomans interpreted for foreign instructors who did not speak Turkish. Of an institutional but altogether different nature was the position of the Naval Dragoman, established much earlier and the first important post to be made available to Christian subjects in the Ottoman Empire. The post was held exclusively by the Greek Phanariots of Istanbul, and the holder of the post was eventually promoted Chief Dragoman to the Sublime Porte. As the duty of the Naval Dragoman was to supervise the regular collection of taxes from non-Muslim subjects in the Mediterranean and Aegean islands under the jurisdiction of the Admiral of the Fleet, his authority far exceeded that of an interpreter. In 1839, however, a series of reforms known as Tanzimat and designed to westernize the empire resulted in limiting the responsibilities of the Naval Dragoman to interpreting.

(d) in foreign embassies and consulates, dragomans were initially provided by the Ottoman government. In the seventeenth century, however, they were appointed by the foreign missions from among Christian subjects, who were exempted from the land and capitation tax levied on non-Muslims. The duty of the dragoman in the diplomatic corps was to interpret and facilitate communication between Ottoman statesmen and the embassies and to handle all correspondence. Some achieved considerable distinction: Mouradgea d’Ohsson, the Armenian dragoman of the Swedish Embassy in Istanbul, was one of the two Christians in the committee of 22 dignitaries asked by Selim III (1761–1808) in 1791 to give their opinion on the reasons for the decline of Ottoman power. In the eighteenth century, the French Embassy started a school to train interpreters for its own use. At the time of Mahmut II (1785–1839) there were 218 consular dragomans, 24 with special warrants, most of whom were Greeks and some wealthy enough to purchase the position. In the final years of the Empire foreign missions appointed their own subjects as dragomans.

Within the above hierarchy, the most important post was naturally that of the dragoman to the Imperial Chancery. Dragomans were initially chosen from Greek, Italian, German, Hungarian and Polish converts to Islam. At the time of Suleyman the Magnificent (1494–1566), Yunus Bey, of Greek origin, is known to have been influential in foreign policy and was entrusted twice with taking treaties to Venice. That he was held in high esteem is shown by the fact that a Translators' Mosque (Durugman Masjid) was built in Istanbul, with the permission and no doubt the support of the Sultan, in recognition of his services. In the seventeenth century, four dragomans were employed at the Sublime Porte, the seat of government. In 1669, following the naval expedition to Crete and as a reward for his special services in the peace negotiations, the Grand Vezir Fazıl Ahmed Pasha appointed Panagiotis Nicoussios Mamounas, a Greek from Chios educated in Padua, as Chief Dragoman. Until the Greek Insurrection in 1821, the office of the Chief Dragoman was henceforth held by the Greek Phanariots of Istanbul, frequently passing from father to son and becoming the cause of much rivalry between the families. Dragomans were allowed to grow a beard, wear fur, keep four servants and ride a horse, privileges denied to other Christian subjects. It was also officially established that Chief Dragomans should have a retinue of twelve servants and eight language apprentices, all of whom were held exempt from the capitation tax which non-Muslims had to pay.

In 1709, the Chief Dragoman Nikolaos Skarlatos was appointed governor of Moldavia and Walachia; promotion to this post at the end of the chief translator’s term of office became regular practice after that. As the principal duties of the Chief Dragoman were to interpret for the Grand Vezir when he received foreign missions and to translate all documents other than those in Arabic, he was privy to state secrets and all details regarding foreign policy.
In the second half of the eighteenth century it was felt that this position of responsibility was beginning to be abused by dragomans in their relations with the French, British and Russians, each rivalling the other in their attempts to gain more influence in the affairs of the Empire. In 1821, the Phanariot Chief Dragoman was executed on suspicion of being involved with Greek revolutionaries. Yahya Efendi, a convert to Islam who taught at the Military School of Engineering, was appointed to the post with the responsibility of organizing a training programme in Greek and French and supervising the work of an ‘impartial’ Greek appointed provisionally as dragoman. The breakdown of established practice and an increasing volume of work eventually led to the foundation of the Translation Chamber at the Porte in 1822; in 1833, the Chamber actively started training Turks and other Muslims as state translators and interpreters. Translation chambers of a similar nature were also set up in other government departments.

The translation chambers had a very significant function in the context of Tanzimat, the series of political, social and institutional reforms that initiated in 1839 the gradual but conscious shift towards a Western outlook. They served as the most important institutional centre for the penetration of European ideas (mainly through French) and for the education of the most distinguished statesmen, thinkers, scholars and literary innovators of the time. Despite conquests that reached into central Europe and active diplomatic and commercial relations, the Ottomans had generally remained indifferent to the ideas of the Enlightenment. It was only in the nineteenth century that the weakening Empire, forced by economic and political circumstances to turn to Europe, began to discover the stimuli for intellectual revival; the foundations of the Westernist modern Turkish Republic were laid in the nineteenth century. Two major phases of acculturation in the Turkish realm must therefore be recognized: Arab-Persian in the fourteenth to fifteenth centuries and European in the nineteenth to twentieth centuries.

The Arab-Persian phase: predominance of Islamic sources

Literary works began to appear in the thirteenth century and increased in number in the fourteenth century, when texts translated from Persian and Arabic played a vital role in the development of the Turkish language. At that stage, the selection of texts seems to have been made on a utilitarian basis, in terms of what was thought to be instructive and useful. Sacred texts and religious writing, therefore, held a very prominent place in the growing corpus of translations during this period. However, the Qur’ān (written in Arabic) was held sacrosanct; so much so in fact that when the Jews, who settled in the Ottoman Empire after their expulsion from Spain, first introduced the printing press in the sixteenth century, the mere possibility of printing in Arabic letters was ruled out by the chief religious dignitary.

The Qur’ān was eventually considered translatable but only on a word-for-word basis. The earliest known interlinear manuscript translations of the Qur’ān into Anatolian Turkish date back to the fourteenth century. Earlier translations into Eastern Turkic, following the mass conversion of Central Asian Turks to Islam in the tenth century, are mainly of two kinds: (a) interlinear, where ‘each Turkic word or phrase is written in smaller characters at an angle of 45 degrees beneath each Arabic word’, a practice which reflects the oral stage in the translation of the holy text, and (b) annotated, where ‘each logical group of Arabic words (generally overlined in manuscripts in red ink) is translated en bloc by a group of Turkic words, forming sentences which use the grammatical, syntactical and literary norms of written Turkic’ (Birnbaum 1990:113–14). The same tradition was followed in Anatolian Turkish versions, while a third type of translation combined the two modes.

Though very rare, there were also some fourteenth- and fifteenth-century trilingual versions in Arabic, Persian and Anatolian Turkish, where the latter was written below the Persian, the first language into which the Qur’ān was translated in the tenth century.

The selection of texts for literary translation from Islamic sources is worth examining in some detail, because many have long been
appropriated by the Ottoman-Turkish literary tradition as original works. Gülşehrî’s fourteenth-century translation of the Persian poet Feridüddîn-i Attar’s masterpiece Mantık’-i-Tayr (The Language of Birds; an allegorical tale within a tale of birds in search of mystic union) is a case in point: this version is said to owe its excellence and ‘originality’ to what the translator contributed to the original in the form of tales from other sources and material of his own composition; and this he did without damaging the unity of Attar’s work, which itself was a poetic ‘elaboration’ of the Arabic Risâlat al-Tayr (Stories of Birds) by Ghazzali. The work of Ahmed-i Dâ, translator, poet, scholar and court tutor, provides further examples. Dâ is described in the literary histories not as a translator but as a poet and scholar, on the basis of his two collections of poetry in Arabic and Persian. But of his nine prose works in Turkish, all were translations except Teressül (Copybook for Writing), a guide to formal and informal correspondence, known as the first book on Turkish composition. Among his prose works, the most important was the first Turkish version of the highly revered commentary on the QUR’ân by Ebu’l Leys-i Semerkandî, followed by an annotated translation of Ayet-ul kursî (the 256th verse of the second Sura of the Qur’ân), which included a glossary, hagiographies, and morality tales of Dâ’s choice and composition. Others were translations of One Hundred Hadîths (holy sayings) of the Prophet Muhammed and Tibb-i nebîvî (The Prophet’s Medical Advice), a collection of his sayings on hygiene and disease. The last was a part-translation of Ebu Naim Hafiz-i Isfahani’s Kitabu’-s-sifa fi akadisi ’l Mustafa (The Book of Remedies), which itself was based on the Persian summary-version by Imam Ahmed b. Yusuf etTîfasî.

Ahmed-i Dâ’s discussions of the strategies he used are highly informative and revealing. In his preface to Miftahu ’l-cennet (Key to Heaven, a guide to virtuous Islamic living) Dâ claimed to have ‘composed [the text] in eight sections’ (Tekin 1992:40–1; translated), i.e. given it a different form from that of the Arabic original. Elsewhere, in the preface to his translation of Feridüddîn-i Attar’s Tezkiret u-l-evliya (Biographies of the Evliya —Muslim saints), he stated that he had ‘liked [the work] so much that [he] could not help translating it’ (ibid.: 45) although it had already been rendered from Persian into Turkish. Dâ was thus engaged in some form of ‘rewriting’, an established practice which had long been popular in Eastern cultures. But Dâ refers to all these works as ‘translations’, including another two ‘translations’ he undertook, one from Persian (Nasir-i Tusi’s Risale-i sifasî, ‘Book of Thirty Chapters’, a treatise on astrology and the calendar), and Ebu Bekr bin Abdullah el-Vasîti’s Kitabu’t-ta birname, ‘Book of Interpretations’ (of dreams), originally in Arabic. In his prefaces, some of which were written in verse, he indicated the source texts and any other texts he used, why he translated them, gave his name or pseudonym, and generally named his patrons, the princes who commissioned them or to whom they were dedicated.

Of the translations that Dâ produced entirely in verse, the most interesting is his rhyming Arabic-Persian dictionary in 650 couplets. This is a shorter version of Reşidüddîn-i Vatvât’s ‘ukdu’-ı-cevahir (Strings of Jewels), which in some manuscripts had the Turkish equivalents written in interlinear form. The dictionary was designed to help teach Dâ’s young pupil, Prince Murat, and served not only as a lexicon but a guide to the Turkish forms of the (classical Arabic-Persian) arzû metre. Dâ’s most important verse translation is Çengname (The Book of Çeng-Lyre, an allegorical story of the Oriental lyre) which, as he explained, was partly a translation of the Persian poet Sadi’s mesnevi (now lost) by the same title, expanded with verses by Dâ himself. His translation of Camâsh-name (The Book of Jamash) by Nasir-i Tusi, also a Persian poet, was in the genre of ‘Mirror for Princes’, morality tales written as counsel for rulers. From the fourteenth century onward, the increasing popularity of ‘Mirror for Princes’ and of the narrative mesnevi form in rhyming couplets led to more translations in the same genre.

Other well-known examples from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries include Kul Mesud’s mainly prose translation of Kelîle ve Dimne (Kelîle and Dimne, animal fables
translated from the Arabic version, itself a translation from Persian, originally written in Sanskrit), Şeyhoğlu’s Marzuban-name (The Book of Marzuban—Governor, a collection of Persian animal fables combined with tales of kings and philosophers) and Merzimek Ahmed’s Kabus-name (The Book of Kabus, a highly popular ‘Mirror for Princes’, by the Persian king Keykavus) commissioned for Sultan Murad II (1421–51) in the fifteenth century. Dai and his contemporaries played an important part in enriching the Turkish language, which was still in its early stages of development. They enjoyed the patronage of the rulers of Anatolian principalities, who resisted the dominance of Persian and were keen to be informed and instructed in Turkish. However, by the end of the sixteenth century the canon of Ottoman poetry had become heavily Persianized. Translation activity, which had initially worked to elevate Anatolian Turkish to the level of a literary language and had provided excellent models in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, must have also played a part in this linguistic takeover at a later stage. The cultural policies of the Istanbul-based centralized government, which had replaced those of the more consciously Turkish former principalities, must also be recognized as a factor contributing to this change in literary and linguistic direction.

**Translation of medical and scientific texts**

In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, scientific texts were written almost entirely in Arabic, the medium of scholarship in Medreses (schools of higher learning). Among the earliest in Turkish were books on medicine, shorter versions of well-known Arabic texts, or compilations from Arabic sources: Muğredat-i ibn Baytar (Ibn Baytar’s Book of Particulars), Havass-ul-edivye (Best Known Remedies), Kamil-ıs-sinaa (Perfect Arts). An eminent doctor of that age, Celaleddin Hızır (known as Haci Pasha), wrote principally in Arabic but also produced two Turkish versions of his own work, a full translation (Miştahab-üs-sifa: Selected Remedies) and a shorter version omitting theoretical chapters (Teshil-üs-sifa: Facilitating Healing), in the preface of which he apologized for writing in Turkish for every one to understand. Most translations of this kind were commissioned by Umur Bey and Isa Bey, princes of Aydin. Mukbil-zade Münim’s Zahreni Muradiye (Diseases of the Body), which was dedicated to Murat II (1404–51), consisted of translations—compiled from Arabic and Persian sources—in which Turkish terms were used along with their equivalents in the source languages, obviously in an attempt to develop medical terminology in the target language. It has also been discovered that among books on surgery, one by Sabuncu-oğlu, rich in Turkish terms and claimed to be an original work by the author, was in fact a translation from the Arabic, known in Europe but not in Anatolia. From the time of Mehmed I (1389–1421), a growing interest in encyclopedic works prompted the writing and translation of many books on the ‘wonders of the world’, such as Zekeriya el-Kazvini’s famous Acaib-ul-mahiukat (Strange Creatures) in Arabic (translated eight times over the centuries), which featured in particular natural and supernatural plants and animals, a favourite topic with some of the Ottoman sultans.

**Contact with non-Islamic cultures**

The interests of Mehmed II (1432–81), and his patronage of translations, were of a different nature. He was competent in Arabic and Persian and particularly interested in reading and discussing the works of the Greek peripatetics and stoics already translated into these languages. The Sultan is also said to have commissioned an Arabic translation of the New Testament.

Following his conquest of Constantinople and other territories, Mehmed II no doubt became aware of his role as patron of crosscultural and scientific scholarship in the Islamic world, where Arabic was the principal language of learning. When he discovered Ptolemy’s Geography among some Byzantine manuscripts in 1465, he had it translated into Arabic (rather than Turkish) by Georgios Amirukis, a renowned Pontic Greek scholar who lived in Mehmed II’s court from 1461 till his death in 1475. He also had two treatises by Ali Kuscu on mathematics and astronomy translated from Persian into Arabic.
Three translations into Turkish from this period are worth mentioning. The first is Plutarch’s Lives which, Gibbon (in Adıvar 1970:25–50) claimed, was translated from Greek on the Sultan’s orders. The second is the life and deeds of Uzun Hasan, the King of Persia, from the Italian original by Giovanni Maria Angiolello, who took part in the expedition with the Sultan’s son. The third text is of particular interest since it was a translation of a detailed exposition of the Christian creed by the Greek Orthodox Patriarch Gennadius Schilarios, who, soon after the conquest of Constantinople, was called into a debate with the Sultan; the debate took place through an interpreter, who was asked to record it in writing. The importance of this document is such that various translators over the centuries were asked to improve on it. The text was part-published in the Mecmua-i Ebuzziya (Journal of Ebuzziya) in Istanbul in 1911.

The scientific renaissance initiated under the patronage of Mehmed II did not continue under his successors. Ottoman science and medicine remained generally confined to the works of and commentaries on Aristotle, Ptolemy, Galen and Avicenna in Arabic, and interest in other cultures was not rekindled until the eighteenth century.

**Translations from European sources in the eighteenth century**

The liberal and aesthetic outlook characteristic of the reign of Ahmed III in the eighteenth century brought about a reawakening of interest in Western Europe. But this interest was mainly in non-literary works. The only European literary work to be translated (with additions) before the Tanzimat (the reforms initiated in the mid-nineteenth century) was Ali Aziz Efendi’s Muhayyelat (Fantasies; 1797–8), a version of Petis de la Croix’s Les Mille et un jours.

In 1717, a committee of 25 was appointed by Grand Vezir Ibrahim Pasha to translate from European as well as Oriental languages. Of this group, Esad Efendi translated Aristotle’s Physics from Greek into Arabic, making note, for the first time in the East, of the telescope and microscope in his annotations. Furthermore, the need for military modernization to prevent further defeats led to the establishment of various schools such as the School of Military Engineering in 1734 and the Military Medical School in 1827; it also encouraged the learning of European languages and the translation of scientific texts. For instance, following the founding of the first school of military engineering in 1734, there appeared two treatises: one on trigonometry, the first modern work on mathematics, part-translated from European sources, and an anonymous translation of Memorie della guerra by Count Raimondo Montecucculi (the Austrian general who fought against the Turkish invasion in 1661–4). Other works translated for the first time include Bernhardus Varenius’ Geographia Generallis (1750), Herman Boerhaave’s Aphorismi (1771) which introduced Harvey’s anatomical treatise on blood circulation to Ottoman medicine, and Ibrahim Mitteferrika’s versions (1731) of two scientific works in Latin, discussing Galileo’s and Descartes’ theories, magnetism and the compass.

A major non-military innovation in the first half of the eighteenth century which also had a bearing on translations was the setting up of the printing press in 1727 by Ibrahim Mitteferrika, a convert of Hungarian origin. Jewish (1493–4), Armenian (1567) and Greek (1627) printing presses had been established in Istanbul long before special permission could be obtained for a Turkish press to print books on non-religious subjects, i.e. excluding the Qur’an and commentaries, holy traditions, theology and holy law (Lewis 1962:51). Among the first books to be published by the Mitteferrika press, starting in 1729, were the Vankulu Lugati (The Vankuli Dictionary, reprinted in 1755–6), which was ‘translated’ (i.e., rendered bilingual) from the Arabic in the sixteenth century, Grammaire Turque, a Turkish grammar in French, Mitteferrika’s treatises (1731), and his expanded version of Cihanname (Showing the World), a geographical work, based on European sources, by Kâtip Çelebi (also known as Haci Halife). Çelebi was the translator of Mercator’s Atlas Minor (1653–5) and a scientific thinker famous for his attempts to break down the barriers between Eastern and Western science in the seventeenth century.

The second printing press, set up at the School of Military Engineering in 1796, also
chose a dictionary as its first book (printed in 1799); this was Burhan-i Kaati (Convincing Proof), ‘translated’ into a bilingual version from the Persian and compiled by Asim Efendi, known as Mütércim (Translator) Asim.

The Tanzimat period: ‘Enlightenment’ through translation in the nineteenth century
The principal revival in scientific and literary translations from European sources followed the setting up of the government Translation Chambers in 1833. However, translation from Persian and Arabic had also reached its peak during the nineteenth century. This state of affairs created tension between Eastern sources of canonical status and sources from the West, the latter as yet peripheral but gaining ground and becoming increasingly powerful. What provided an additional impetus not only to the modernizing reforms of Mahmut II but to acculturation with Europe was the earlier and more extensive westernization programme of Mehmed Ali Pasha, the Khedive of Egypt, who was in open competition with the Sultan (see ARABIC TRADITION).

Among the new cultural institutions of the mid-nineteenth century was the Academy of Sciences (Encımen-i Dantiş), established in 1851 and subsidized by the government, and the Ottoman Scientific Society (Cemiyet-i İlimiye-yi Osmaniye), founded in 1860 by Münif Pasha, an eminent member of the Translation Chamber who was educated in Egypt. At these centres, which included non-Muslim members, translation activity from European sources was organized to provide teaching materials for a prospective university and to introduce and promote scientific and scholarly work. A translation of J.B. Say’s Catéchisme d’Économie Politique (1852) and a biographical dictionary of eminent European statesmen, both by Abro Sahak Efendi, were among the first works to be published by the Academy. Several histories were also written or translated by the members of the Academy but remained in draft form and were never published; they included Ahmed Ağrıbozi’s history of Ancient Greece, Todoraki Efendi’s translation of a history of Europe, and Aleko Efendi’s book on the last Napoleonic campaigns. The first history of Greek philosophy in Turkish, Abrégé de la Vie des Plus Illustres Philosophes de l’Antiquité, was translated by Cricor Chumarian and published independently in İzmir in 1854 in the form of parallel texts, with the original in French.

In 1865, three years after the Academy was closed, a Translation Committee was formed on similar lines, headed once again by Münif Pasha, the founder of the Scientific Society. The works known to have been published by this committee were translations of two books on history and geography, from English and French respectively. Münif Pasha also introduced a more influential medium for the dissemination of Western scientific thought with his Mecmuası Fımun (Journal of Sciences), the first Turkish journal of sciences, which also carried translations; it was published intermittently between 1862 and 1882 by the Scientific Society. Münif Pasha was instrumental in introducing a new literary genre with his selection of translations of philosophical dialogues by Voltaire, Fénelon and Fontenelle, under the title Muhaverat-i Hikemiye (Philosophical Dialogues; 1859). This work is highly significant, given that it was the first to introduce the basic tenets of European Enlightenment in Turkish, and in an environment where ‘philosophical speculation divorced from theology was considered heretical’ (Mardin 1962:224).

Two other translations appeared in the same year and marked the awakening of interest in European classics; they too were to have a lasting influence on forms and ideas that shaped modern Turkish literature. Terceme-i Telemak was a version of Abbé Fénelon’s Les Aventures de Télémaque, a politicalphilosophical novel, but also a ‘mirror for princes’, which was more readily acceptable in the Ottoman tradition that favoured Eastern examples of this genre. Télémak was first circulated in manuscript and was not published until 1862. The translator was the Grand Vezir Yusuf Kamil Pasha, who had served in Egypt, where the work had already been translated into Arabic and was well received. Tercüme-i Manzume was a collection of verse by La Fontaine, Lamartine, Gilbert and Racine, translated by Ibrahim Şinasi to introduce European poetry in traditional arzı verse
(adapted from classical Arabic and Persian) to facilitate its reception.
The first literary translators had thus served to introduce three new literary genres: Western poetry, philosophical dialogue, and the novel. A year later, in 1860, İbrahim Şinasi wrote the first Turkish domestic comedy and serialized it in the newspaper Tercüman-i Ahval (Interpreter of Conditions) in 1860. Şinasi, who had trained at one of the departmental translation chambers and had visited France, was also the founder and chief editor of Tasvir-i Efükar (Illustration of Ideas, established 1862), one of the first private Turkish newspapers to appear in Istanbul. A true innovator, the translations he serialized on literature, social and economic topics, as well as political thought made his newspaper the most stimulating and popular of the time. He used journalism as a medium to put into practice his policy for simple Turkish prose, which had a lasting influence on the future of modern Turkish language and literature. Both literary and non-literary translations in newspapers and periodicals served as one of the most important means of implementing this policy, which was adopted by writers and journalists to communicate more easily with their readers.
Victor Hugo’s Les Misérables was serialized in 1862, followed in subsequent years by Chateaubriand’s Atala (1869), de SaintPierre’s Paul et Virginie (1870), Voltaire’s Micromégas (1871) and Dumas père’s Le Comte de Monte Cristo (1871). The strategies followed in such translations of fiction, most of which were later published in book form, created a general awareness of the translators’ norms and of the problems they faced. In his preface to Atala (published in book form in 1874), Recaiçade Ekrem drew attention to the inadequacy of contemporary Turkish prose for the purposes of translation. To improve on the first serialized versions, Micromégas (1871) and the first eight chapters of Les Misérables (1879) were retranslated by Ahmed Vefik Pasha and Şemseddin Sami respectively. Ahmed Vefik Pasha, a renowned lexicographer like Şemseddin Sami, also retranslated Les Aventures de Téléméaque (1881). In contrast to Yusuf Kamil Pasha’s earlier translation in the traditional grand style, his version used simpler vocabulary and syntax, intended to be literal and accurate, as well as pleasing for the reader. Şemseddin Sami, criticized for being too literal in his version of Les Misérables, defended his strategy in his preface to his translation of Robinson Crusoe (1885), arguing that new ideas could not be conveyed in the conventional Ottoman style and that close adherence to the source text and the use of simple prose were conscious moves to use the full potential of the Turkish language. Their contemporary Ahmed Midhat Efendi, on the other hand, pursed not one but a variety of rewriting strategies in his numerous versions of classics and popular books rendered from French. In his prefaces, he frequently expressed his aversion for ‘literal’ translation because the result did not read like an original; he contributed to the elaboration of a critical/theoretical discourse which explored distinctions between concepts such as ‘translation’, ‘interpretation’ and ‘appropriation’.
The years 1873–83 were the most productive for the writers/translators of the Tanzimat. Subsequently, censorship in Abdülhamid II’s reign led mainly to the translation of popular French fiction. The Constitutional Revolution of 1908 and the deposition of Abdülhamid II were followed by a significant revival of translations of canonized works in history, philosophy and the social sciences, as well as English, German and Russian literature. Abdullah Cevdet, who translated Shakespeare, and journalists Hüseyin Cahit and Haydar Rifat were the most active and committed translators of the period.

Translation in the Republic (1923 to the present)

As in the nineteenth century, translation in the early twentieth century was instrumental in initiating the cultural revolution which supported the Westernizing programme of the secular republic of Turkey, founded by Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk) in 1923. In 1924, Remzi Kitapevi, a private publishing company, started its series Translations from World Authors. In the same year, a Commission for Original and Translated Works was formed by the Ministry of Education to produce publications for educational purposes. In 1928, the Roman script was officially adopted.
to replace Arabic letters. The first Turkish translation of the Qur‘ān in the Roman alphabet appeared in 1932. The movement for simple Turkish that had begun in the nineteenth century ultimately resulted in the statesponsored radical language reform of the republic in the 1930s, whereby Turkish was also to be ‘purified’ of Arabic and Persian influence.

The revolutionary move made by Hasan Ağlı Yücel, Minister of Education, in setting up a Translation Committee in 1939 and a Translation Office in 1940 was intended to reinforce the new language policies and to organize a programme for cultural revival. The Office, composed largely of academics and prominent men of letters, was to select and translate ‘world classics’, beginning with Ancient Greek philosophy and literature. Such key texts were also essential for instruction in the new humanities departments of the universities in Istanbul and Ankara. The general aim was to ‘generate’ the spirit of humanism by cultivating and assimilating foreign literatures through translation; this, it was felt, would bring about a renaissance and contribute to the development of the Turkish language and culture.

By the end of 1944, the most intensive translation period, 109 works were translated, headed by the Greek and French classics. By 1967 more than 1,000 translations were published, among which Eastern and Islamic texts constituted a very small proportion. A change in government policies and the dismissal of its leading members led to the Office losing its initial impetus after 1950. Throughout the 1960s, however, following the constitutional changes of 1961 that allowed for greater freedom of thought, private publishing companies became actively involved in the translation of Marxist/socialist literature, though such activity had its risks even for well-established translators and men of letters.

The Translation Office produced the periodical Tercüme (Translation; 1940–66), which was highly influential not only in terms of drawing attention to the activities of the Office but also in terms of creating a critical forum for the discussion of literary translation. Two prestigious translation journals, Yazko Çeviri Dergisi (Yazko Translation Journal; 1981–4) and Metis Çeviri Dergisi (Metis Translation Journal; 1988–92), continued in the same tradition. The launch in 1994 of a new quarterly periodical, TÖMER Çeviri Dergisi (Literary Translation Journal), under the auspices of Ankara University, suggests that interest in literary translation remains strong.

As shown in the Index Translationum, the total number of translated titles from 1982 to 1986 was 4,459. According to the Turkish Publishers’ Association annual catalogue, the total number of translations (including intralingual translations from Ottoman into contemporary Turkish) on the market by October 1994 amounted to 6,028. Statistics supplied by a private bookshop (Pandora) show that in 1993, before the economic recession fully hit the market, 668 titles (more than two thirds) of a total of 1,518 new publications (excluding textbooks and publications by government ministries/official institutions) were translations.

Since the mid-1980s, Turkish publishers have kept up with the world market by publishing translations of international literature, from prizewinning fiction to popular bestsellers. Figures for the 1990s also indicate a growing interest in publishing translations in the fields of history, philosophy, psychology, social sciences, gender studies, children’s literature, and the arts. Turkish versions of international encyclopedias have enjoyed an unprecedented boom since the early 1980s.

A project launched by the Publications Department of the Yapı Kredi Bank in 1991, the Kâzım Taşkent Publication Series, currently pays generous fees for the translation of classics as yet unpublished in Turkish. Literary translation prizes were awarded by the Turkish Language Academy from 1959 to 1984.

Training, research and publications
The Economic and Social Studies Conference Board set up in 1961 by the Ford Foundation, Turkish industrialists and academicians was the first to initiate a training programme for conference interpreters in Switzerland, which subsequently continued to operate in Turkey. Some of the first professional interpreters to be trained by this programme are now also actively involved in training at the various universities.
In response to a growing demand for competent professional translators and conference interpreters in English, departments of translation and interpreting were set up in 1983–4 in two universities, Boğaziçi (Istanbul) and Hacettepe (Ankara). Apart from four-year degree courses, these departments also offer MA and PhD degrees in translation studies. The PhD programme at Boğaziçi University was the first to offer a course on the history of translation in Ottoman/Turkish society, with the aim of foregrounding the links between translation and literary/cultural history. Yıldız Technical University (Istanbul) provides training in French, Bilkent University (Ankara) in French and English. Istanbul University offers an MA degree in Translation for graduates from the English and German Departments.

By contrast to the wealth of translations that have accumulated over the centuries, the number of studies in the field remains very small. The majority have so far focused on nineteenth-century translations from European languages; there are no historical studies of modes, models or theories of translation based on the corpus from Persian/Arabic. Bibliographies are far from adequate. However, since the mid-1980s Boğaziçi University has been particularly active in conducting descriptive/analytical and theoretical studies, generally rooted in the POLYSYSTEM THEORY tradition. Linguistic and pedagogical studies have been actively pursued by Hacettepe University, which has published Çeviribilim ve Uygulamaları (Studies in Translatology) since 1992. In 1995, TÖMER/Bursa launched the first book in the series Çeviribilim (Translatology).

Despite the very large number of technical/literary translators and translation agencies, there is no professional organization which represents translators in Turkey. Interpreters are represented by the Association of Conference Interpreters, founded in 1969 with the aim of promoting the profession and establishing principles that conform with the international standards of the ASSOCIATION INTERNATIONALE DES INTERPRÉTES DE CONFERENCE (AIIC). In 1996, the Association had approximately 30 members working in simultaneous, consecutive and bilateral interpreting, as well as written translation.

Further reading


SALIHA PAKER

Biographies

ATAÇ, Nurullah (1898–1957). Literary critic and translator and son of Ata Bey (d. 1919), who is renowned for his translation of Hamner’s Ottoman History. Nurullah Ataç was appointed by the Ministry of Education as head of the Translation Office in 1939–45 to supervise the team of distinguished translators who aspired to bring about the ‘renaissance’ of Turkish culture through the translation of Western classics. He translated from French and was a controversial literary critic and a stylistician in his own right, a purist in his use of language, who had a powerful impact on modern Turkish prose.

CEVDET, Abdullah (1869–1932). Medical doctor, poet, writer, publisher and translator. An ideological leader of the Young Turk movement, Cevdet had a tumultuous career and, until 1911, spent most of his life in exile in Switzerland and Egypt, fighting with his pen against the despotism of Abdulhamid II. He was a prolific writer and the first to produce full translations of Shakespeare’s tragedies. These were influential but not too popular on stage because of their high-flown poetic diction. In 1908, the year of the constitutional revolution which marked the end of Abdulhamid II’s reign, he published (in Cairo) his translations of Hamlet (performed in Istanbul in 1912) and Julius Caesar. These were followed by translations of Macbeth (1909), Romeo and Juliet (serialized in Sehba in 1909–10), King Lear (1912) and Anthony and Cleopatra (1921). Cevdet also translated Gustave Le Bon’s works, which were highly influential. His version of Dozy’s Essai sur l’histoire de l’Islamisme, published after 1911, was banned because it was critical of Islam and the Prophet.
ERHAT, Azra (1915–83). Essayist and translator. Educated in Belgium, Erhat was one of the first Turkish classicists. She lectured at Ankara University but was dismissed in 1945 for her left-wing views. She was also a member of the Translation Office, for which she translated Sophocles, Euripides, Aristophanes and Plato. Her translations (with the poet A. Kadir) of the Iliad and the Odyssey in free verse have long been recognized as masterpieces.

EYÜBOĞLU, Sabahattin (1908–73). Essayist and translator. Eyüboğlu lectured in French at Istanbul University and later worked for the Ministry of Education, where he took over from ATAC in 1945 as head of the Translation Office. His translations range from Plato’s Republic (for which he won, with his cotranslator M. A. Cimcoz, the first translation prize of the Turkish Language Academy) to Montaigne, Rabelais, La Fontaine, Melville, Camus and Babeuf. Eyüboğlu was leader of the ‘Humanist’ group of scholars and translators operating at the Office and, like ERHAT, was persecuted for his ‘Humanism’, which at the time was confused with Communism, but remained active as one of the foremost intellectuals of his time.

MIDHAT EFENDI, Ahmed (1844–1913). Novelist, short story writer, journalist, publisher and translator. Founder of the newspaper Tercüman-i Hakikat (Interpreter of Truth, 1878) and of the first Turkish publishing house in Istanbul, Ahmed Midhat was the most prolific and wide-ranging translator of the late nineteenth century. He has been criticized for his prolific output, ‘for his gigantic appetite, Xavier de Montepin and Eugène Sue were of the same stuff as Cervantes and Hugo, and Zola could easily be put aside in favour of Paul de Kock’ (Tanpinar 1981:462). Nevertheless, Ahmed Midhat was extremely influential in drawing attention to the need for translating European classics and to the impact of translations on genres and models that were burgeoning in Ottoman-Turkish literature at the time. He was also the first to write short stories in Turkish; these were published in the same collection with his translations from the French.

MÜTERCİM ASIM (1755–1819). Lexicographer, historian and poet, he owes his title Mütercim (Translator) to his meticulous work on two dictionaries which were much esteemed in the nineteenth century. The first was Tıbyan-i Naﬁ der Terceme-i Burkhan-i Kaati (Translation of Burhan-i Kaati: Convincing Proof—with Useful Explanations), a bilingual version of the Persian dictionary by Huseyin b. Halef of Tabriz; it was published in 1797 and presented to Sultan Selim III, earning him a house, a teaching post and a salary. The second was Kamusu’l Basıt ft Tercemet’l-Kamusu’l-Muhit (Simplified Version of the Translation of Kamusu’l Muhit: Universal Dictionary), a bilingual version of an Arabic dictionary by Firuzabadi, published in 1814–17 but presented earlier, in 1810, to Sultan Mahmod II; for this Mütercim Asim was appointed to a higher teaching post and was also made judge of Salonica. The dictionaries are not just ‘translations’ (though named as such in the titles) but critical editions of the Persian and Arabic monolingual originals, with many corrections and additions from other sources. He made every effort to provide Turkish equivalents (sometimes from his home province Antep) for Persian and Arabic words. Mütercim Asim also wrote Tuhfe-i Asim (Asim’s Rhyming Dictionary), a rhyming Arabic-Turkish dictionary which was published in Egypt in 1838.

SAMI, Şemseddin (also called Şemseddin Sami Bey Frasri; 1850–1904). Novelist, journalist, translator and lexicographer. A pioneering novelist in modern Turkish literature, Şemseddin Sami, of Albanian origin, was educated in a Greek gymnasium in Yannina. Apart from numerous translations from the French, most notably Les Misérables, he wrote Kamusu-i Fransesi (French Dictionary), the first French-Turkish and Turkish-French dictionaries, published in 1882 and 1885 respectively. His other influential lexicographical works are Kamusu’l Alam (Universal Dictionary, 1889–98), an encyclopedic dictionary in six volumes, and Kamusu-iTürki (Turkish Dictionary, 1899–1900), a monolingual dictionary in two volumes which is considered a landmark in terms of the
purification of Turkish from Persian and Arabic influence.

VEFIK PASHA, Ahmed (1823–91). Statesman, diplomat, translator and lexicographer. Like many statesmen of his time, Vefik Pasha began his career in the Translation Chamber at the Sublime Porte. He was the grandson of Yahya Efendi, ‘variously reported as having been of Bulgarian, Greek or Jewish origin’ (Lewis 1962:86), a mathematician who was appointed the first Muslim Chief Dragoman after 1821 and son of Ruhuddin Mehmed Efendi, also a mathematician who served as dragoman at the Ottoman Embassy in Paris in 1834–8. Vefik Pasha learnt French as a young boy when he attended the Lycée St Louis in Paris, became a diplomat after his apprenticeship at the Translation Chamber, went back to Paris as ambassador, was appointed Grand Vezir and served as the president of the first Ottoman parliament in 1876. He is best known for his 16 translations of Molière (published as a collection in 1879–82), which were instrumental in introducing a new genre into the Ottoman dramatic tradition. He adopted various strategies while translating the Molière comedies, the most popular of which are generally considered ‘adaptations’ to an Ottoman setting, and with Ottoman characters. Vefik Pasha built a theatre in Bursa, where he was provincial governor, and is known to have personally supervised the production of the comedies he translated.

SALIHA PAKER