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Multilingualism, Translation, Transfer: Persian in the Ottoman Empire

Scholars from various disciplines have highlighted the widespread use of Persian among scholars and elites in the Ottoman Empire as part of the larger multilingual region of the Eastern Mediterranean and beyond during the early modern to modern periods. Concepts such as the 'Persophonie' (Bert G. Fragner)[1] or the 'Persianate World' (Nile Green; Abbas Amanat and Assef Ashraf),[2] which go back to Marshall Hodgson's term 'Persianate' to describe regions influenced by Persian culture,[3] observed the significant influence of Persian in the fields of literature, education and, to some extent, administration and diplomacy (e.g. as a *lingua franca*) in much of the eastern Islamic world from the eleventh to the nineteenth centuries. This is also true for the Ottoman Empire.[4] However, these discussions still lack adequate contextualisation and a methodological approach that allows for an analytical understanding of the phenomenon of the spread of Persian as a particular mechanism of knowledge transmission and exchange in these contexts. The notion of the distribution and translation of Persian works into Ottoman Turkish as a product of transregional and intercultural entanglements in the broader Transottoman sphere thus poses an ongoing challenge to contemporary scholarship, especially regarding the discussion of the Persian language and its role and significance in various cultural, literary, and political realms.

The Ottoman Empire – spanning the fourteenth to the early twentieth centuries as a significant political entity in Anatolia, Southeast Europe, the Middle East, and North Africa – is particularly well-suited to the historical analysis of reception and translation processes. A critical focus of the special issue is the role of translations, fostered by patronage, in shaping the identity of social groups against the backdrop of long-term political and intellectual developments in the Eastern Mediterranean and Middle East. The analysis of translations of Arabic and Persian works into Turkish intersects with the study of Islamic scholarly cultures, early modern empire-building, and the Eastern Mediterranean and Middle East as regions of multilingual societies. In this regard, the spread of Arabic and Persian in various beyliks indicates that from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the Old Anatolian Turkish literary language underwent a process of forming a consciously hybridised, Arabised-Persified Turkish literary language. Alongside Arabic and Persian, this language became one of the

1 Fragner 1999.
2 Amanat and Ashraf 2019; Green 2019.
3 Hodgson 1974, vol. 2, 293.
4 Riyāḥī 1990.

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'three languages' (*elsine-i ṣelāṣe*) of the Ottoman elite and scholars. The emergence of a Turkic-Islamic culture in Anatolia was significantly influenced by pre-existing Arabic and Persian literatures.[5]

Recent publications, such as those by Murat U. İnan, highlight the role of Persian in shaping an imperial Ottoman identity and the self-positioning of its elites both at the royal court and in the provinces.[6] This development manifested in direct patronage relationships between poets and princes or high officials in Istanbul and provincial courts in Bursa, Edirne, Manisa, Amasya, or Kütahya. Additionally, it is evident in the increased reception of Persian classics like Farīd al-Dīn ʿAṭṭār's *Pandnāma*, Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī's *Maṣnavī*, Saʿdi's *Būstān* and *Gulistān*, Ḥāfiẓ's *Dīvān*, and the works of the Herat mystic ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Jāmī. This was not confined to the early period, as illustrated by the eighteenth-century poet ʿOṣmānzāde Aḥmed Tāʾib, who lamented in a *qasida* about individuals attempting to write poetry without having read Saʿdi's *Gulistān*.[7]

The repeated copying of Persian works was accompanied by a remarkable number of Turkish translations, commentaries, and multilingual dictionaries. This phenomenon extended beyond Anatolia to the Balkans, with centres of Persianate scholarship in regions like Sarajevo, Mostar, and Giannitsa. On the other end of the Islamic world, Richard Eaton identifies a 'Persian cosmopolis' in the Indian subcontinent during the extended early modern period, rooted in the production and circulation of translations of canonical Persian works into various vernacular languages.[8] This concept is, to some extent, also applicable to the Eastern Mediterranean context.

The objective of the special issue is to bring together contributions dealing with Persian and Ottoman Turkish language contacts in the fields of language, literature, history, and material culture, and to explore the role of multilingual practices, especially translation, which are an essential part of knowledge production in the respective traditions. In addition, the publication is intended to provide a forum for exchange between scholars of Ottoman, Iranian and Arabic studies and beyond who are concerned with the interactions of the *elsine-i ṣelāṣe* in the Ottoman Empire and examine their functions as well as the interrelationships between languages, (literary) genres, and disciplines. This approach goes back to the discussions of the conference 'Multilingualism, Translation, Transfer: Persian in the Ottoman Empire,' which took place at the Gotha Research Library from 27 to 29 April 2023, and was organised by the two editors of this issue, as well as Ludwig Paul and Ani Sargsyan (both Hamburg) within the framework of the DFG-funded Priority Programme 'Transottomanica:

5 The beginnings of this development are discussed in Peacock 2019, 147–87.

6 İnan 2019a; İnan 2019b; İnan 2020. See also Peacock 2007, 167–74, for parallels at the Samanid court in Central Asia in the ninth and tenth centuries.

7 Aynur 2006, 484.

8 Eaton 2019, 70–1.

Eastern European-Ottoman-Persian Mobility Dynamics' (2017–2023).[9] Also important in this regard is the ongoing work of the Emmy Noether Junior Research Group TRANSLAPT, situated at the University of Münster, which investigates translation processes from Arabic and Persian into Ottoman Turkish during the early modern period across various text genres.[10]

Adding to this point, one of the objectives of this issue is to contribute to the still understudied role of Persian and Ottoman language knowledge within the framework of premodern 'European' scholarship. Unlike the extensive scholarly investigation of Arabic studies in Europe (conducted, for example, by Robert Jones and Alexander Bevilacqua),[11] Ottoman and Persian studies, along with their relevant source materials – often translations and dictionaries – have only recently captured the interest of book and manuscript historians. In this regard, scholars such as Nil Ö. Palabıyık[12] and Paul Babinski[13] have made significant contributions to our understanding of scholarly engagement with Persian and Ottoman texts in general, and to European collectors' interest in 'Oriental' poetry, especially the *Gulistān*.

Conceptually related to the historical neglect of Persian and Ottoman language and knowledge acquisition in Europe is the long-standing assumption that Ottoman poetry is inferior to Persian classics. This assumption is also undergoing a reevaluation, marked by the works of Murat U. İnan and others, regarding the impact of Persian poetry on Ottoman Turkish poetry.[14] One of the aims of this issue is to challenge such assumptions and to explore the individual and comparative worlds of these languages and literatures through self-explanatory case studies encompassing various genres and interdisciplinary perspectives.

In particular, the contributions of this issue focus on the actors (or institutions) involved in and facilitating such multilingual processes, on the processes themselves as forms of preservation, adaptation, etc. of knowledge, or on the products (i.e. the translations contained in manuscripts and prints) and their reception within the Ottoman Empire and beyond during the early modern period. The contributions – eight in total – therefore include topics such as the translation of literary genres from Persian into Ottoman Turkish, the reception of Persian at the Ottoman court or in the Ottoman public sphere (e.g. in *medrese*s or Sufi contexts), the role of multilingual practices (Arabic/Persian/Turkish), or the migration of Persian literati to the Ottoman Empire. Of particular importance in this context is the first contribution to the special issue by Andrew Peacock, 'Persian in the Lands of Rum: Texts, Translations and Courtly Patronage,' which provides a comprehensive overview of the phenomena discussed in

9 We wish to thank the PP Transottomanica, especially Stefan Rohdewald and Florian Riedler (both Leipzig), for intellectual and financial support, and Feras Krimsti, curator of the Oriental manuscripts in Gotha, for his hospitality.

10 See uni.ms/translapt.

11 Bevilacqua 2018; Hamilton 2021; Jones 2020.

12 Palabıyık 2019; Palabıyık 2023.

13 Babinski 2019; Babinski 2020.

14 İnan 2017.

detail within the following articles. Scholarly attention to Persian texts composed in Anatolia during both the pre-Ottoman and Ottoman periods has been limited, and Persian is often viewed as an alien language in this context. Peacock provides an overview of the role of Persian in Anatolia and the Ottoman Empire from the twelfth to the nineteenth centuries. He argues that Persian texts were more extensively disseminated in the mediaeval period than commonly assumed. Furthermore, he examines the evolving status of Persian during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, including the factors contributing to its decline in favour of Turkish. Lastly, the article presents manuscript evidence indicating that even in the later Ottoman period, Persian was not confined merely to a source of literary models.

Veronika Poier's paper titled 'Literary Chains Frozen in Tile? Proposed Literary Connections between Salmān Sāvajī and Aḥmedī as Observed in the Persian Epigraphic Programme of the Green *Zāviye* in Bursa (821–827/1419–1424)' gives an art historian's perspective to the Green Complex (Yeşil Külliye). Poier investigates the layers of Arabic and Persian epigraphy in the Green Complex in the Western Anatolian town of Bursa built for Meḥmed I (r. 816–824/1413–1421) as representations of the literary horizon of the time. The epigraphic combination of Arabic and Persian verses in an early Ottoman realm hint at the practice of multilingualism, whereas an overall discussion is still missing. Poier's main argument is that the epigraphic programme is a 'source frozen in tile and time,' which connects Anatolian architecture and literature. She discusses Salmān Sāvajī's (d. 777/1376) poetry in comparison with Tāceddīn Aḥmedī's (d. 815/1413) works, namely, the two respective court poets, the first representing the Jalāyirid court and the latter that of Meḥmed I. The texts in the Green Complex give a new glimpse into the transregional connections between the post-Mongol Turkmen world and the Ottoman sphere of influence. This adds an important literary perspective to the field of art history and so opens art works to historians of literature.

Philip Bockholt's article, 'Translating the Controversial: Turkish Translations of Sexual Norms in the Persian Mirror for Princes *Qābūsnāma*,' explores a prominent mirror for princes composed by the Ziyārid ruler Kay Kāvūs in Iran in the mid-eleventh century. The *Qābūsnāma*, intended for Kay Kāvūs' son Gīlānshāh, addresses statesmanship, commerce, and familial and social obligations. It is among the earliest examples of the *Andarznāme*, *Pandnāme*, or *Naṣīḥatnāme* genre in Persian. This work was translated into Old Anatolian Turkish several times during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Focusing particularly on Chapter 15, which discusses bodily pleasures, Bockholt analyses the translators' interpretations of Kay Kāvūs's views on sexual inclinations towards men and women. The article traces the evolution of the *Qābūsnāma* from Iran to Anatolia during the beylik and Ottoman periods and identifies the key figures involved in its translation.

In the fourth contribution of the current issue, 'Reading Mustawfī in Turkish: A Study on Translation as a Means for the Transfer of Botanical Knowledge in Ottoman Kurdistan,' Sacha Alsancakli explores how translation facilitated the transfer of botanical knowledge in Ottoman Kurdistan. The study focuses on a mid-seventeenth-century Turkish translation of the Persian encyclopaedic work *Nuzhat al-Qulūb* by the Ilkhanid historian Ḥamdallāh Mustawfī Qazvīnī (d. 740/1340). This trans-

lation, commissioned by Abdāl Khān (r. 1031–1074/1622–1664), the ruler of the Kurdish emirate of Bidlīs, is preserved in two manuscripts housed in Ankara's Millî Kütüphane, catalogued as MSS A 957 and A 979. The article particularly examines the botanical section in MS A 979, focusing on the numerous marginal and interlinear notes added by two later readers. These annotations provide Turkish names for various plants, supplementing the original translation, and sometimes include information on their medicinal and pharmacological properties. This case study on paratextual elements aims to enhance our understanding of translation as a vehicle for knowledge transfer in the Ottoman Empire.

The chapter by Zakir Hussein Gul, titled 'Persian Idiom, Ottoman Meanings: Introducing Kemālpaşazāde's *Nigāristān*,' delves into a lesser-known work by the renowned bureaucrat, author, and poet Kemālpaşazāde (875–940/1468–1534). Although Kemālpaşazāde has recently gained recognition for his contributions to lexicography and orthodox Sunnism in the Ottoman context, his purely literary achievements remain underexplored. This paper introduces his literary masterpiece, the Persian-language *Nigāristān*, composed just months before his death as *şeyḫülislām*. The study positions this work in relation to Saʿdī's *Gulistān* and the *Bahāristān* of his Timurid contemporary ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Jāmī. Gul critiques the 'dislocative nationalistic' discourse that dismisses Kemālpaşazāde's and similar works due to perceived stylistic unoriginality. He examines the implications of the title *Nigāristān*, exploring its connections to contemporary Chinese influences, Kemālpaşazāde's metaphysical views, and Jāmī's literary millennialism. Building on the intertextual analyses by Paul Losensky, Benedek Péri, and Murat U. İnan, Gul argues that Kemālpaşazāde's adaptation of Persian narratives enriches the originals and showcases his deep knowledge of the *elsine-yi selāse*, as well as embedding contemporary Ottoman meanings.

Kameliya Atanasova's contribution, 'Persian Poetry, Sufi Authority, and Ottoman Multilingualism: İsmāʿīl Ḥaḳḳı Bursevī's Qurʾān Commentary, the *Rūḥ al-Bayān*,' examines the use of Persian poetry in the Ottoman Sufi's renowned *tafsīr*, *Rūḥ al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qurʾān* ('The Spirit of Elucidation in Qurʾānic Interpretation'). Atanasova argues that Bursevī integrates Persian poems with traditional exegesis sources to elucidate complex Sufi concepts for a broad audience interested in both Persian literature and Sufism. This approach not only facilitates understanding but also enhances Bursevī's religious authority within his Sufi order and beyond. Atanasova builds on Shahab Ahmed's thesis that Rūmī's *Maṯnavī* intertwines the meanings of the Qurʾān and fiction, demonstrating that Bursevī extends this method to a broader Sufi, Persian literary corpus. This highlights his multilingualism and scholarly erudition, positioning him and his order within a well-established canon.

Hülya Çelik's article, 'Court Librarian Sebastian Tengnagel's Persian-Turkish-Latin Dictionary Project and a Turkish Captive's Multilingualism in 1614,' highlights the significance of Persian beyond the Ottoman Empire by examining the making of the manuscript, Vienna, Cod. A. F. 26, *Luġat-i Emīr Ḥüseyin al-Ayāsī*. The Viennese court librarian Sebastian Tengnagel (d. 1636) collaborated with a Turkish captive, Dervîş İbrāhīm, who copied a manuscript sent by Leiden librarian Daniel Heinsius (d. 1655), Cod. Or. 227 of Leiden University Library titled *Luġat-i Niʿmetullāh*. Notably, Cod.

A. F. 26 closely matches the entries of Niʿmetullāh's (d. 969/1561) popular dictionary; while not identical, it is a recension or new arrangement. The article explores how early sixteenth-century Ottoman lexicography influenced European scholarship, using Tengnagel's project as a case study to show the impact of Ottoman Turkish language skills on European lexicographical works.

Renaud Soler's contribution, titled 'Food and Poetry: Kebab Imagery in Persian and Turkish Poetry,' explores the history of kebab imagery from the eleventh-century *Shāhnāma* to the early twentieth century. The study highlights the significance of this metaphor within Persian and Turkish poetry, examining its historical and evolutionary contexts. The kebab imagery is rooted in Eurasian meat-eating practices and the epic figure of the hunter-king. Soler investigates the cultural contexts of Turco-Persian poetry, considering both the lavish feasts of palaces and the bustling streets with their roasters and cooks. These settings provided poets with rich material, allowing them to use kebab imagery to express emotions such as fear, love for an enemy or protector, and the profound effects of spiritual experiences or divine love.

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