

Claiming Expertise against Orientalists and Reviving Islamic Knowledge in the Republic: *İslâm-Türk Ansiklopedisi* (1940–1948)¹

Abstract

Debates in the 1940s surrounding the state-sponsored translation into Turkish of a central orientalist reference work, the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, gave marginalized *ulema* and their supporters the opportunity to (re)claim interpretive authority over Islam and to attain political influence. Through the publication of a rival encyclopaedia, the *İslâm-Türk Ansiklopedisi*, alongside a journal, the *İslâm-Türk Ansiklopedisi Mecmuası* (1940–1948), these *ulema* expressed their own claim to expertise and aimed to revive their scholarly and intellectual tradition in the face of representatives of the last generation of Ottoman *ulema* gradually passing away. For this purpose, they used several strategies on two levels, aimed firstly at *asserting* their own expertise and secondly at *denying* expertise to their rivals, the ‘orientalists and missionaries,’ such as invoking their own biographies and credentials, the complexity of their field, or their international impact on the one hand, and analysing methods, political aims, power dynamics and alleged neutrality and universalisms on the other hand. My case study demonstrates that the enactment of expertise always takes place within existing ideological debates and socio-political dynamics, as the *ulema* counteracted the ascription of expertise to orientalists to demand more resources, authority, and power for themselves in the long run.

Keywords: late Ottoman, Turkey, *ulema*, orientalist, religious scholarship, encyclopaedia

‘This is their slogan: «Muslim-Turkish writers are bound to creed, but orientalists and missionaries to scholarship!» [...] So, it has become a crucial task to demonstrate the true scholarly quality and colouring of the latter.’²³

The early 1940s saw the outbreak of a fierce debate in the Republican Turkish press, including state representatives, scholars at Istanbul University, dissidents critical of the Kemalist state, former Ottoman *ulema*, and even voices from abroad. The underlying question was: Who can truly provide neutral, scientific and impartial knowledge about Islam, and what are the implications of interpretive authority being ascribed to certain agents and denied to others? The debate erupted after the Ministry of Education’s deci-

1 This paper is based on my master’s thesis titled *Gelehrter Widerstand. Kritik an kemalistischer Religionspolitik im Spiegel der İslâm-Türk Ansiklopedisi Mecmuası und İslâm-Türk Ansiklopedisi (1940–48)*, submitted at the University of Bamberg in 2021.

2 Eşref Edib 1942b, 3.

3 All translations are my own.

sion in 1939 to translate into Turkish the trilingual *Encyclopaedia of Islam*,⁴ published from 1913–1936 due to growing colonial interest in Muslims and Muslim cultures in the 19th century. However controversial, this state project was a window of opportunity for the above-mentioned *ulema* to reclaim their position as *actual* experts of Islam – as opposed to ideologically motivated Western orientalist and their ‘local aides’ – by publishing an alternative encyclopaedia, the *İslâm-Türk Ansiklopedisi*,⁵ alongside a journal, the *İslâm-Türk Ansiklopedisi Mecmuası* (1940–1948), as a response.

In this paper, I examine how marginalized *ulema* and their supporters expressed their own claim to expertise via these publications and legitimized the need for *their* encyclopaedia through citing their own biographical and intellectual background rooted in their Ottoman education and their criticism of orientalist work and the facilitation of the translation project by Turkish institutions. Through their strategies of claiming expertise and calling for a ‘truly’ scholarly and scientific encyclopaedia about Islam, the *ulema* at once implicitly aimed to gain more resources, responsibilities, and authority for themselves and, closely related, to preserve – or rather revive – their own scholarly and intellectual tradition in the face of representatives of the last generation of Ottoman *ulema* gradually passing away.

E. Natalie Rothman’s⁶ account of *transimperial* expertise, with the two main features *mobility* and *relationality* characterizing the expertise of actors such as dragomans moving between different socio-cultural contexts, also informs my understanding of *post-imperial* or *post-Ottoman* expertise, embodied in the *ulema*’s actions and discourses. Displaying mobility on different levels, (post-)Ottoman *ulema* and intellectuals, too, were navigating between different socio-political contexts – albeit with a restricted scope of action – shaped by a dismantling of their traditional standing and an extensive restructuring of political as well as educational institutions in the transition from Empire to Republic. Also, the relationality of expertise, thus its dependence on recognition by others in a process of continual negotiation and contestation through specific practices and performative strategies, is a key element of my analysis. As E. Summerson Carr puts it, ‘expertise as enactment’ means recourse to linguistic resources⁷ and the mastering of an ‘expert register [...] that is recognized as a special kind of knowledge.’⁸ The interactional nature of ‘expertise as enactment’ and as ‘something people do rather than [...] hold,’⁹ inevitably has an ideological dimension to it, as claims to expertise are located within ‘hierarchies of value that authorize particular ways of seeing and speaking as experts,’¹⁰ especially relevant in a moment of socio-political transformation.

The actors I study claim to be the true experts and demand authority specifically with reference to and by a mobilization of their own history and intellectual tradition,

4 Houtsma, M. Th. et al. (eds.) 1913–1936.

5 Eşref Edib et al. (eds.) 1940–1948.

6 Rothman 2009.

7 Carr 2010, 19.

8 *ibid.*, 20.

9 *ibid.*, 18.

10 *ibid.*

invoking specific linguistic resources, as will be shown below. I argue that from my actors' perspective, expertise meant proficiency in the Islamic disciplines nurtured by a rich and long-standing tradition of (Ottoman) Islamic learning and scholarship, which was, at the same time, perfectly in line with the needs of modernity, comprehensive, multidimensional and international. With this claim to extensive expertise, they made a stand against Western orientalist whom they regarded as impostors led by political interests, wrongly recognized as the true authorities on Islam by representatives of the Turkish state, simply for the fact of being allegedly 'neutral' observers as non-Muslims. This depiction of their expertise was crucial in a moment when *ulema* saw their knowledge and position challenged on several levels.

With their intervention, the Ottoman *ulema*, besides asserting claims to expertise, also joined other Ottoman and Republican critiques of orientalism predating Edward W. Said's work, as elaborated by Zeynep Çelik. Drawing from late Ottoman and early Republican texts produced between 1872 and 1932 in diverse fields such as the press, (feminist) literature, poetry, or academic disciplines such as history or art history, her edited volume illustrates a thorough engagement with orientalist and Eurocentric arguments about Islam and the Middle East and the related methods.¹¹ It thus directs attention to the wide-spread local consciousness about the impact of orientalist views and to the agency and intellectual contributions of actors from the region itself, even before the rise of postcolonial studies in the West. Following up on Çelik's findings, but also qualifying her argument that the multi-voiced criticism of orientalism slowly faded away in the 1930s,¹² my paper clearly demonstrates that it was in fact still vivid and referenced on various levels in the 1940s.

To put forth my arguments, I will first briefly introduce some of the provisions in the early Republic pertaining to the social and political position of the *ulema*. Next, I will contextualize the Ministry of Education's decision to translate the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* as part of an attempt to build a new and secular knowledge base disjoined from the Ottoman tradition. This will entail an analysis of the preface to the Turkish translation and statements by actors involved in the official translation project. In the third and main part, I will follow the trajectory of the alternative *İslâm-Türk Ansiklopedisi* to examine the strategies of the *ulema* and their supporters to claim expertise and interpretive authority regarding Islam. To identify their arguments, I will analyse their writings, especially covering topics such as the aim and scope of their encyclopaedia, their own position, and criticism of their adversaries, both in the journal, the *İslâm-Türk Ansiklopedisi Mecmuası*, and in their alternative encyclopaedia itself. I will also engage with the accompanying press debate. In the fourth part, I will touch upon the political demands deriving from these, followed by my conclusion.

11 Çelik 2020.

12 *ibid.*, 54.

1. Introduction

Transformations regarding the position of the Ottoman *ulema* as a socio-religious class within the government apparatus, along with developments in its institutional structure and educational system, as well as attempts to strengthen state control over religion, can be traced back to the early 19th century. Traditionally, the *ulema* held a monopoly over questions regarding Islamic teachings and represented a cornerstone of the Ottoman political, judicial and educational systems, maintaining control over central functions. Earlier historiographic narratives about the role of the *ulema* in official modernization efforts from the Ottoman Empire to the Turkish Republic often suggested a conflict between progress and modernity on the one hand and hostile, traditionalistic and backward religious scholars on the other hand. In contrast, recent studies question this narrative and highlight the ways in which, despite increasing state control, the *ulema* continued to occupy crucial socio-political positions and managed to maintain their relevance and agency as a dynamic institution.¹³ This study is also a contribution to this historiographic trend.

Nevertheless, the marginalization of the *ulema*, coupled with increased control of religion, reached new heights during the early Republican period, when the ‘secularist drive [...] was the most characteristic element of Kemalist reform’¹⁴ in state and society. The newly delineated role for religion in the Turkish nation-building process had far-reaching consequences for the socio-religious class of the *ulema*. Several laws passed in 1924 such as that abolishing the caliphate, the Law of Unification of Instruction (*tevhîd-i tedrisât*), and the law effecting the replacement of the Ministry of Sharia and Endowments (*Şer’iye ve Evkâf Vekâleti*) by the Directorate of Religious Affairs (*Diyanet İşleri Re’îsliği*),¹⁵ subordinate to the prime ministry and with far fewer responsibilities and financial resources, had an immediate impact upon the *ulema*, their major areas of action, and their status.¹⁶ Secularizing reforms, e.g. in the realm of jurisdiction and education,¹⁷ resulted in the dissolution of the institution of the *‘ilmîye*.¹⁸

Institutional overhauls were paired with efforts to create a ‘modern’ and ‘rational’ interpretation of Islam from a ‘Turkish nationalist perspective’¹⁹ led by the ‘anti-clerical

13 For more information on the changing socio-political roles of Ottoman *ulema* in the context of modernization efforts, religious reform and state formation from the late Ottoman Empire to the Turkish Republic, see e.g. Bein 2011; Bektaş 2023; Gunasti 2016 and 2019; Kara 2005, 2016 and 2017; Lord 2018; Toprak 2019.

14 Zürcher 2017, 188.

15 Henceforth referred to as ‘Diyanet.’

16 Kara 2017, 55–7.

17 For a comprehensive account of secularizing reform policies and their connection to nationalism from 1925–1935, as well as an assessment of their impact, see Zürcher 2017, 188–96.

18 One of the major institutions within the Ottoman state organization and umbrella term for the Ottoman *ulema* class, which was trained in official *medreses*.

19 Hanioglu 2011, 131–2.

and positivist faction'²⁰ of the ruling elite. Despite *ulema* opposition to the law, the Law of Unification of Instruction, originally stipulating the control of the *medreses* by the Ministry of Education, in practice resulted in their dissolution right after its adoption. Contrary to the initial specification to establish and maintain further venues of religious learning and research such as a Faculty of Theology and *İmam Hatip* Schools, in the course of the 1930s, these limited institutions were also dissolved,²¹ and religious education in schools was removed from the curricula.²² In line with the intended break with the Ottoman past and a reshaping of press and publishing,²³ the alphabet reform in 1928 severed ties to the Ottoman religious and intellectual tradition and rendered classical textbooks and other sources unusable.²⁴ In addition to the disappearance of institutions for scholarly engagement with the Islamic religion and culture and *ulema* being stripped of their occupational positions, more initiatives attested to the pervasive marginalization of the *ulema* and the delegitimization of the body of knowledge produced by them: The controversial Declaration about the Reform of Religion (*Dini İslah Beyannamesi*), prepared by a number of scholars at Istanbul University and leaked to the press in 1928, reflected upon engaging foreign philosophers of religion to 'scientifically'²⁵ identify the 'essence' of Islam, explicitly ruling out the ability of representatives of traditional Islamic disciplines to do so.²⁶

In the press and even in parliament, the *ulema* and religious functionaries were, in continuation of a process starting in the 19th-century Ottoman Empire, and now with even greater vigor, publicly discredited,²⁷ and 'forced to endure in silence a barrage of condescending publications on the alleged obscurantism and backwardness of the Ottoman religious establishment, as well as frequent criticism of the Ottoman *ulema*'s ostensible transformation into a priesthood-like organization.'²⁸ As late as 1948, in the debate over a reform of religious education, the member of parliament and later Minister of Education Tahsin Banguoğlu (1904–1989) advocated for a containment of the backwards '*medrese mentality whose last aged representatives (medrese zihniyetinin yaşlanmış son mümessillerini)* we see gathered around the Diyanet.'²⁹

20 Lord 2018, 54.

21 Kara 2016, 211; Kara 2017, 57–60; Zürcher 2017, 188; see Toprak 2019, 109–10 for information regarding the number of closed *medreses*.

22 Brockett 2011, 119; Kara 2016, 209; Toprak 2019, 110–1.

23 Erken 2018, 35; Gürçağlar 2008, 102–3.

24 Toprak 2019, 113.

25 For an account of the emergence of the discourse surrounding science and its interrelations with ideas around civilization, modernity and nationalism in 19th-century Ottoman Empire, see Yalçınkaya 2015.

26 Bein 2011, 128; Flöhr 2020, 153–4; Kara 2016, 132–4, 151.

27 Bein 2011, 106–7, 133; Kara 2017, 193; Toprak 2019, 188.

28 Bein 2011, 106.

29 As cited in Yörükân 1948, 4–5.

2. Providing 'Secular' Knowledge about Islam: Translating the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*

However, there was still dire need for knowledge production on Islam, e.g. to control and shape religious beliefs of the population, to 'nationalize' religion, and for intellectual or academic purposes. This was the case at the onset of the Republic as well as in the years that followed. For instance, as the existing religious institutions were abolished or weakened without providing comparable and trustworthy alternatives, in 1925 the Turkish parliament still had to resort to Ottoman scholars such as Elmalılı Muhammed Hamdi (1878–1942) to provide a Turkish Quran translation and commentary, aligning with its aims to provide direct access to the text and render the *ulema* redundant in the long run – which was, however, circumvented by the latter, who developed strategies on their part to advocate for their own positions.³⁰

In the 1930s, some intellectuals argued that the complete rejection of the Ottoman-Islamic past and the void it caused had produced a cultural crisis.³¹ The literary historian Mehmed Fuad Köprülü (1890–1966) bemoaned the lack of introductory works about Islamic civilization for his students at Istanbul University, which he deemed necessary for a comprehensive assessment of Turkish history; he therefore decided to translate a book by the orientalist and historian Vasily Bartold (1869–1930) for this purpose.³² The absence of academic publications on Islam was also discussed at the first National Publication Congress in 1939, in the aftermath of which Hasan Âli Yücel (1897–1961), Minister of Education from 1938 to 1946, instructed a committee at Istanbul University to undertake the translation into Turkish of the *Encyclopaedia of Islam: A Dictionary of the Geography, Ethnography and Biography of the Muhammadan Peoples* – regarded as the 'crown jewel of Western Orientalism of the time,'³³ 'prepared by a number of leading orientalists' as proclaimed on its title page, and a 'quintessential expression of traditional European orientalism, with all that it implies for both good and bad,'³⁴ e.g. its 'Arabistic and philologicistic prejudices'³⁵ and prevalent essentialism.³⁶

A diverse team at the Faculty of Literature, including among others literary scholars, linguists, and historians, and presided over by the physician and historian of science Abdülhak Adnan Adıvar (1882–1955), would be carrying out the task of publishing the

30 For more information on the trajectory of the Quran commentary prepared by Elmalılı Muhammed Hamdi, its political implications in the context of the early Republic, and Elmalılı Muhammed Hamdi's strategies to circumvent state efforts to shape religion according to current ideological trends, see Gunasti 2019 and Flöhr 2020. These studies are also insightful accounts of the life and career as well as positioning and agency of an Ottoman scholar in a transitional period, as exemplified by Elmalılı Muhammed Hamdi.

31 Koçak 2001, 383, 390–3.

32 Eyice 1992, 86; Kara 2016, 426–7.

33 Bein 2011, 115.

34 Daniel 1998, 433.

35 Hodgson 1974, 40.

36 *ibid.*, 39–41.

İslâm Ansiklopedisi. İslâm Âlemi Tarih, Coğrafya, Etnoğrafya ve Biyografya Lûgati (Encyclopaedia of Islam. Lexikon of the History, Geography, Ethnography and Biographies of the Islamic World).³⁷ Mehmet Şerefettin Yaltkaya (1880–1947), head of the Diyanet from 1942 to 1947, was the only member explicitly known as a scholar of Islam, an *‘âlim*.³⁸ Initially, the committee intended to prepare a verbatim translation, and it was only the realization during the preparation of the first fascicle that entries concerning the Turkish and Turkic world were deficient that led to the decision to correct, complete and rewrite certain entries.³⁹

The preface to the Turkish *İslâm Ansiklopedisi*, while conceding that there were certainly some orientalist who were led by imperialist, colonial and missionary ambitions, generally expresses great admiration and appreciation of their work, mentioning several names specifically.⁴⁰ In contrast, it disparagingly asserts that the scholarly engagement with Islam in Turkey itself in the past centuries had mainly consisted of genres such as commentary or translation, being repetitious and generating scant original insight.⁴¹ Adivar justifies the translation of the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* as a response to the pressing need for a reference work in Turkish for students and scholars not proficient in any foreign language.⁴² As the committee’s focus lay on *Turkish* culture and history, and entries on the Islamic religion were deemed important only inasmuch as they were somehow relevant for the understanding of the former, in the 1940s,⁴³ the translation committee mainly corrected, upgraded or completely rewrote articles specifically pertaining to *Turkish* historical figures and events. In contrast, it abstained from major changes in entries on essential religious topics such as ‘Allah,’ as well as other regions of the Islamic world – a tendency also noted by foreign scholars.⁴⁴

İsmail Kara thus identifies two objectives of the state-sponsored translation project: first, the ‘establishment of a secular and Western foundation for Islamic culture on an academic level’ (*akademik düzeyde laik ve batılı bir İslâm kültürü zemini*),⁴⁵ and second, to reinforce Turks’ role in historiographic narratives through expanding ‘Turkish’ entries.⁴⁶

In general, a rather reserved language regarding Islam is identifiable in the preface, as though its connection to Turkish culture is accepted only begrudgingly and as a matter of necessity, which is also evident in the committee member Nihad Mazlum Çetin’s (1924–1991) assessment that the *İslâm Ansiklopedisi* ‘viewed’ Islamic culture from an ‘alien win-

37 İstanbul Üniversitesi Edebiyat Fakültesi (ed.) 1940–1987.

38 Köprülü 2001, 43.

39 *ibid.*, 43–4; Kara 2016, 447–8.

40 İstanbul Üniversitesi Edebiyat Fakültesi (ed.) 1940, viii–xiii.

41 *ibid.*, xiii.

42 *ibid.*, xvii.

43 It should be noted that the translation of the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* was conducted over several decades and thus subject to varying socio-political contexts. In this paper, I am solely focusing on the years in which the alternative encyclopaedia project, the *İslâm-Türk Ansiklopedisi*, was published in parallel.

44 Kara 2016, 450; Spuler 1950, 323–5.

45 Kara 2016, 449.

46 *ibid.*

dow⁴⁷ and that many Turkish intellectuals attributed to Western orientalists as ‘outsiders’ an objectivity in the evaluation of Islam that Muslims by default could not display.⁴⁸ Therefore, unsurprisingly, this endeavour was embarked upon independently from representatives of traditional Islamic scholarship, who were excluded from this knowledge production process and whose works, expertise and experiences were rendered invisible.

3. Resisting: Call for a ‘Truly’ Scholarly Encyclopaedia by Ottoman-Turkish *ulema*

Ulema as representatives of this tradition did not remain silent and seized the opportunity to emphasize the continuing relevance of their expertise and their indispensability. In fact, they had been aware of the fact that translations of orientalists’ works were circulating in Turkish and had tried to tackle the ‘danger’ emanating from them through their own publications and counter-narratives since late Ottoman times.⁴⁹ This is also one of the reasons why the *ulema* themselves were a driving force behind the decision to translate the Quran into Turkish in 1925 and for their intervention for the production of a reliable Turkish commentary under their own control by Elmalılı Muhammed Hamdi in the face of a public atmosphere in which defective publications were abundant and institutions of Islamic learning under threat.⁵⁰ The publication of books was one of the very few instruments with which the *ulema*, e.g. as representatives of the Diyanet, could still exert some limited influence,⁵¹ yet still in the framework of highly restrictive laws regarding press and publishing and the expression of religious subjects.⁵²

So, in the 1940s, the *ulema* could draw on their experience and a number of previous strategies to advocate for themselves in an increasingly oppressive context. They also did so in publishing the *İslâm-Türk Ansiklopedisi*. The encyclopaedia appeared from 1940 onwards in fascicles, and the publication stopped in 1948 with the second volume remaining unfinished with 384 pages, despite the initial aim to publish two volumes per year with 1,000 pages each.⁵³ The publishing endeavour was undertaken by *Asar-ı İlmiye Kütüphanesi*, which was owned by Eşref Edip Fergan (1882–1971) and one of the very few publishing houses in the early Republic that published a limited number of books on religious topics.⁵⁴ Unsurprisingly, these ambitious goals could not be achieved, as this private initiative with scant resources was, according to the editors, dependent on readers’ subscriptions – one of the challenges frequently discussed in the corresponding *İslâm-Türk Ansiklopedisi Mecmuası*, as will be shown below.

47 As cited in *ibid.*, 450.

48 *ibid.*

49 Bilgin 2018, 172–4; Flöhr 2020, 181–2.

50 Flöhr 2020, 176–8.

51 *ibid.*, 167, 178; Kara 2017, 199; Toprak 2019, 178.

52 For more information on the legal framework, see Brockett 2011, 66; Erken 2018, 38–9, 42, 46; Toprak 2019, 217–8. From 1924–1950, the Diyanet could publish merely 30 books, ten of them being from 1945–1950, see Kara 2016, 433.

53 Aykut 2001, 57; Kara 2016, 494.

54 For more information on the publishing house, see Erken 2018, 42–3; Kara 2016, 478.

3.1 Transparency through Biographies, Credentials, and Merits

One of the aspects the editors of the *İslâm-Türk Ansiklopedisi* frequently took up in their critique of the state-sponsored *İslâm Ansiklopedisi* was the fact that it was unclear and opaque as to which scholars the translation committee consisted of and what their credentials were. So, openly – and in fact, proudly – expressing who *they* were and what enabled *them* to publish a reference work of such importance was core to their own initiative.

They did so using several tools like biographical references, beginning with the title page of their encyclopaedia, which introduces the editors as follows: İsmail Hakkı İzmirli⁵⁵ (1869–1946), *ordinaryüs profesör*⁵⁶ and former dean of the Faculty of Theology; Kâmil Miras⁵⁷ (1875–1957), Diyanet representative and translator and commentator of the canonical hadith collection *Şaḥiḥ al-Buḥārī*; Ömer Rıza Doğrul⁵⁸ (1893–1952), author of the Quran commentary *Tanrı Buyruğu* and of *İslâm Tarihi – Asr-ı Saadet*, an extensive overview of Islamic history; and finally, Eşref Edip Fergan,⁵⁹ owner of the *Asar-ı İlmiye Kütüphanesi*. The editors all had been influential in Ottoman public life, either as journalists and activists during the Second Constitutional Period (1908–1918) and the War of Independence (1919–1923), or in education, both in teaching positions and in committees dealing with the reform of religious education. Also, most of them had been – at least temporarily – pushed out of public life in the early years of the Republic, with three of them being sued by an Independence Tribunal.⁶⁰ From the mentioning of their most significant positions and works on the title page, it can be inferred that these works probably enjoyed recognition as they were deemed suitable to lend the editors authority.

References to the credentials and accomplishments of the editors and other contributors are further explicated in the introduction to the encyclopaedia. Publishing an encyclopaedia is described as a serious endeavour to be faced on a national and international level. However, it is stated that luckily, there were indeed a considerable number of experts available for this:

It is with deepest pride that we can announce the truth that we are able to find all these specialists (*ihtisas sahiplerini*), and knowledgeable and authoritative experts (*ilim ve sâlahiyet erbabını*) who [...] display merits which even set them apart from their colleagues in different parts of the world, here in our own country.⁶¹

55 For more information on İzmirli, see Birinci 2001, 530–3; Özervarlı 2001, 533–5; Özervarlı 2007; Sentürk 2007, 311–3.

56 The term refers to the highest academic rank achievable within Turkish academia during the specified period.

57 For more information on Miras, see Flöhr 2020, 196–7; Yazıcı 2005, 145–6; Yazıcı 2012.

58 For more information on Doğrul, see Debus 1991, 199–202; Kara 2016, 434–6; Öz 2018, 48; Uzun 1994, 489–92.

59 For more information on Fergan, see Albayrak 1995, 473–4; Debus 1991; Kara 1987, 13–4.

60 The Independence Tribunals were special courts established during the War of Independence to prosecute crimes such as treason and espionage.

61 Tahrir Heyeti 1940–1944, 9.

The team of contributors is characterized as follows: Firstly, it consists of Turkey's internationally renowned scholars of Islam (*İslâm uleması*) such as İsmail Hakkı İzmirli. Secondly, the diverse and comprehensive character of the team is emphasized, enabling the *İslâm-Türk Ansiklopedisi* to be a common work of the country's intellectuals (*münevverleri*), scholars (*ilim adamları*), and in sum 'all Turkish and Islamic thinkers' (*bütün Türk ve İslâm mütefekkir[leri]*) for the first time ever. Thirdly, the encyclopaedia also includes contributions and has secured wider support from the 'most famous and greatest ulema of the Islamic world' (*İslâm âleminin en tanınmış büyük ulemasının*).⁶² Moreover, the editors stress their openness to contributions from scholars and experts (*ilim erbabı*) among Western orientalist scholars who are solely guided by scholarly and scientific ambitions⁶³ – the reference to orientalist scholars putting their work in the service of colonial aims being implicit.

Their self-conception and identity as explicitly Muslim scholars does not, in their view, impede their objectivity, the lack of which they ascribe to 'orientalists and missionaries' (*müşterek ve misyoner*), as they frequently designate the authors of the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*.⁶⁴ They explicitly describe their own publication as a 'scholarly and academic work' (*ilmî ve akademik bir eser*).⁶⁵ This scholarly and academic character, as well as a legitimation of their work on multiple levels, is guaranteed by, among other things, the diversity of the team, including theologians, historians, literary scholars, turcologists and other scholars from varying disciplines, many of whom had positions in institutions as the Diyanet, such as Ahmet Hamdi Akseki (1887–1951), or Istanbul University, such as the physician, writer and artist Süheyl Ünver (1898–1986).⁶⁶ Thus, there is an aspiration to present a comprehensive and multifaceted expertise in their work, warranted by the authors' multivalent backgrounds, both intellectually and geographically, and visible also in the choice of different self-designating terms, both traditional and more recently adopted ones, such as *ulema*, *iẖtis̱as sahiḇi*, *münevver* or *ilim adamı*.

The journal that accompanies the rival encyclopaedia includes many clues and programmatic articles by the editors, mainly Fergan, about the objectives of their encyclopaedia, reflections upon its importance, and polemics against opponents. On a regular basis, it also provides short biographies of the contributors to the encyclopaedia and points out the relevance and specific features and qualities of their contributions to encourage the readers to engage with them. In these biographical overviews, aspects such as their educational backgrounds in Ottoman institutions, different positions and milestones in their careers, and their activities both in Ottoman and Republican institutions come to the fore. Oftentimes, the scholars' impact on an international level is invoked as a further credential. To offer an example, in the biography of Ahmet Hamdi Akseki, assistant to the Diyanet president from 1939 to 1947 and president from 1947 to 1951, we learn about his multidimensional Islamic expertise and perspective, having taken both the classical path of acquiring knowledge in *medreses* in the traditional

62 *ibid.*

63 *ibid.*, 10.

64 See e.g. Eşref Edib 1940, 2–3.

65 [Eşref Edip] 1946c, 3.

66 Kara 2016, 453.

Islamic disciplines, and simultaneously a modern one by completing his studies with a focus on philosophy at the then-recently-established Faculty of Theology at Istanbul University. We further learn about his teaching activities in several Ottoman institutions as well as his many publications. Emphasis is placed on his efforts in committees discussing the reform of religious education and his ‘great innovations and revolutions’ (*büyük tecdüüt ve inkılâplar*)⁶⁷ in the field of *medrese* education. Regarding Akseki’s impact beyond Turkey, we learn that one of his books was translated by the government of Afghanistan to be taught in schools.⁶⁸ This biography of Akseki in fact does not remain the only one to be published: when this valued contributor is appointed Diyanet president in 1947, the editors highly acclaim this development and publish yet another and even more extensive and venerating account of his life and work as the most competent and deserving Diyanet president yet.⁶⁹

The biographical accounts of one of the editors, İsmail Hakkı İzmirli, are another case in point. An extensive overview of his life and works is even distributed over two issues of the journal. In the description of his numerous works, his pioneering ideas especially in the establishment of an updated form of *kalām*,⁷⁰ dealing with the challenges of modern philosophy in the late Ottoman Empire, are emphasized.⁷¹ He is singled out as editor-in-chief and the driving force behind the encyclopaedia, which represents the ‘last and most prosperous stage of perfection of his scholarly life (*ilmî hayatının en son ve en feyizli tekâmül merhalesi*) exceeding half a century.’⁷² An account of an event organized in honour of İzmirli’s 75th birthday provides an emotional portrayal of the respect, acknowledgement and devotion shown by the guests towards the man himself as well as his ‘works, his innovations in the instruction of *fiqh*,⁷³ *kalām* and philosophy, [...] his philosophical profession, and his international scholarly standing (*felsefî mesleğini, beynelmilel ilmî mevkiini*).’⁷⁴ Translations and the impact of his publications beyond borders are invoked to underline qualifications and expertise.⁷⁵

67 ‘Tahrir Heytimizden [sic]. Profesör Ahmet Hamdi Akseki’ 1940, 3.

68 *ibid.*, 3–4.

69 Miras 1947, 9.

70 Classical Islamic discipline dealing with doctrines of the Islamic faith through rational arguments to avert doubts, often translated as ‘speculative theology.’

71 ‘Büyük Üstad İsmail Hakkı İzmirli’nin ilmî hayatı [sic] ve eserleri’ 1940, 3–4; ‘Büyük üstad İsmail Hakkı İzmirli’nin ilmî hayatı ve eserleri’ 1940, 4–5.

72 Eşref Edip 1946, 3; Miras 1946, 2.

73 Classical Islamic discipline dealing with religious norms, often translated as ‘Islamic jurisprudence.’

74 Eşref Edip 1945, 2. For an account of İzmirli’s and other Ottoman scholars’ contributions to debates surrounding a reform of Islamic disciplines in light of challenges such as modern science and positivism, see e.g. Bein 2011, 46–8; Özervarlı 2007, 87–90; Sentürk 2007.

75 E.g. Doğrul 1946, 3–4. For İzmirli’s works translated into Arabic, see Birinci 2001, 531–2. In general, the journal *Sebilürreşâd* (1908–1925 and 1948–1966), also published by Eşref Edip Fergan and supported by his circle, was influential and popular beyond Ottoman borders, especially in Russia; for more information on this, see Debus 1991, 48. From this, it can be inferred that contacts beyond Turkey most likely persisted into post-Ottoman times.

With İzmirli, but also other figures such as Akseki, the editorial board can in fact offer a work by 'major figures among late-Ottoman scholars' and representatives of 'chief intellectual bodies of the time.'⁷⁶

In addition to biographical accounts of the contributors, interestingly, as more of these scholars passed away and their obituaries appeared with increasing frequency in the 1940s, these homages continued to honour them by way of pointing out their impact and importance; and indeed the obituaries seem to be mourning the loss of a scholarly tradition and decrying the existential threat to the entire cultural and intellectual legacy connected to it.⁷⁷ Not just the figurative loss, but the literal demise of the representatives of this tradition, the scholars 'who are thankfully not yet extinct but become fewer and fewer,'⁷⁸ is identified as a major problem, as their absence would aggravate the challenges associated with the scarcity of reliable books, resources and knowledge on Islam in the early Republic.⁷⁹ This is also a source of contempt for Yaltakaya, then Diyanet president and member of the translation committee of the *İslâm Ansiklopedisi*, who had, according to the editors of the *İslâm-Türk Ansiklopedisi*, failed to engage and coordinate these *ulema* for scholarly activities, e.g. for the translation of truly relevant fundamental works into Turkish, instead misusing his position for the promotion of his own works.⁸⁰

To further highlight the importance of this Ottoman scholarly tradition, convey authority and authenticity, and establish confidence among the readers, personal ties and lineages of scholarship are pointed out alongside connections to Ottoman institutions. This is the case when the appointment of Ahmet Hamdi Akseki as Diyanet president in 1947 is also celebrated because he had learnt from figures such as Mûsâ Kâzım (1858/9–1920), İzmirli and Mehmet Şemsettin Günaltay (1883–1961), 'masters who had fully captured both Eastern and Western philosophy' (*Şark ve Garp felsefesini hakkile kavramış üstatların*).⁸¹ To recognize that two of the editors of the encyclopaedia, İzmirli and Miras, have a special and higher position in the team compared to the other two, Doğrul and Fergan, as actual Ottoman *ulema* having followed the classic path in acquiring their religious education, there are photos of them in the introduction, while photos of the other two are missing.⁸²

Faced with disdain and disrespect on several levels, the *ulema* are keen to demonstrate the complexity of their own field and the skills needed to be able to pronounce even a minor judgement regarding any aspect of Islam. They contrast the lack of recognition accorded to them with the general readiness to grant this mastering of complexity to representatives of other fields:

76 Özervarlı 2007, 83.

77 E.g. 'Reis-ül-hattatin Kâmil Efendi' 1941, 4–5.

78 Çantay 1947, 15.

79 Eşref Edib 1941b, 3.

80 Çantay 1947, 15.

81 Miras 1947, 8.

82 Tahrir Heyeti 1940–1944, 10.

Are the religious disciplines and religious judgements (*dinî ilimler, dinî hükümler*) inferior to those others? How can we accept that somebody who does not hold adequate knowledge and competence (*yeter derecede bilgisi, mümaresesi*) in the religious disciplines, which are categorized according to different classifications and entail very essential and subtle principles, norms and issues respectively (*[m]üteaddid tasniflere tâbi bulunan ve her biri çok mühim ve ince asılları, kaideleri, meseleleri ihtiva eden dinî ilimlerde*), claims to speak in the name of these disciplines (*bu ilimler namına*) and pretends to act as a *muğtabid*?⁸³ [...] If there are no doctors without diplomas and no engineers, judges or attorneys etc., without certificates, how can we assume that one can be a *faqih, mufasssir, muhaddi* or an *‘alim*, without having studied [these disciplines]? Is the science of religion (*din ilmi*) so irrelevant as to not be in need of any kind of specialization (*ihstisasa*)?⁸⁴

The initiators of the rival encyclopaedia see their work as an opportunity to not only provide reliable knowledge for laypersons, but also to

revive Islamic studies (*İslâmî tetkikatı canlandırmak*) which are weakened day by day, and to serve Turkish scholarship and intellectuals (*Türk irfanına ve Türk münevverlerine*) by publishing studies by *ulema* and trustworthy specialists in Islam (*İslâm âlimlerinin, İslâmiyat mütebassıslarının tetkikatını*).⁸⁵

In doing so, they frequently refer to late Ottoman reform efforts in different fields they were involved in, depicting a complex and vivid history.

In fact, they aim to revive these disciplines not only in Turkey, but in the Islamic world as a whole, by means of their encyclopaedia, in which they include modern perspectives.⁸⁶ The editors see their encyclopaedia and their scholarly outlook as a first step to an Islamic ‘awakening’⁸⁷ through transregional exchange and a revival of the relations between Ottoman-Turkish *ulema* and scholars from other backgrounds. For this purpose, they attempt to collaborate with scholars from predominantly Muslim countries such as Egypt, Syria, Palestine, India and Iran.⁸⁸ As an example for this, they publish encyclopaedic entries and journal articles by the Iraqi historian ‘Abbās al-‘Azzāwī (1890–1971) and several other international actors.⁸⁹ Underlining their immediate impact, they recount not only that they received orders from places as far as Alexandria in Egypt,⁹⁰ but also that their encyclopaedia project was getting atten-

83 Eşref Edip 1947, 11–2.

84 *ibid.*, 14.

85 Eşref Edip 1941b, 3.

86 Tahrir Heyeti 1940–1944b, 15.

87 *ibid.*, 14.

88 Tahrir Heyeti 1940–1944, 9–10.

89 See e.g. ‘Sabık Azerbaycan Cumhuriyeti Millî Şûra Reisi Resûlzade Mehmet Emin’ 1943, 2; ‘Bu sayıdaki yazılar’ 1943, 1; ‘Bu sayıdaki yazılar’ 1945, 1.

90 [Eşref Edip] 1943, 4.

91 For the views of another Muslim intellectual based in Egypt, Raşid Riḍā (1865–1935), on the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* and its connections to colonial ambitions, see Ryad 2009, 40–1.

tion and praise as an example in the Iraqi press.⁹² The efforts to revive a collaboration beyond borders testify to an attempt to display an expertise with a transregional dimension to it – interesting also given the fact that Turkish-speaking Ottoman *ulema*'s contributions to debates in Islamic modernism in the broader Islamic world are still often overlooked in academic scholarship,⁹³ as are the 'earlier interest of Istanbul ulama in modernization, their closer and more direct contact with Europeans.'⁹⁴ The dissident *ulema* tried to make this tradition visible.

3.2 Deconstructing Orientalists' and Missionaries' Unscholarly Bias

The editors of the *İslâm-Türk Ansiklopedisi* had adversaries against whom they tried to hold their ground on two levels: firstly, the authorship of the European *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, and secondly, the creators of its Turkish translation. In their journal, in which they frequently criticize specific entries, also presenting their own coverage of the same topics as a much more reliable substitute, they attentively observe and comment on the ongoing translation process. However, their encyclopaedia, the *İslâm-Türk Ansiklopedisi* itself, also offers space for engaging in this battle.

The entries about Adam are a case in point. This entry, penned in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* by Max Seligsohn (1865–1923), is translated into Turkish in the state-sponsored *İslâm Ansiklopedisi* with two footnotes indicating minor corrections.⁹⁵ Thus, unlike other articles, it is not a revised or rewritten version. Now, in the respective entry in the *İslâm-Türk Ansiklopedisi*, under the subheading 'Critique of the Encyclopaedia of Islam' (*İslâm Ansiklopedisi'ni tenkid*), Doğrul asserts that Seligsohn's entry was solely based on *isrâ'iliyât*, i.e. narratives assumed to be of non-Islamic origin and, according to Doğrul, contradicting Quranic principles.⁹⁶ Thus, there is criticism on the methodological level, e.g. regarding the selective use of sources by orientalistes tending to overemphasize the importance of *isrâ'iliyât* in the Islamic intellectual tradition. Doğrul's critique, however, also pertains to another level when he moves on to analyse orientalistes' and missionaries' intentions in their use of sources: According to him, they are misrepresenting the Islamic teaching about Adam as it constitutes a serious threat to their worldview, with the absence of the original sin in Islam shattering the foundations of Christianity.⁹⁷ Concrete and specific criticism in terms of insights and methods is often conflated with a more sweeping account of presumed intentions and objectives, and with allegations against an assumed collective of Western orientalistes and missionaries.

The essence of this critique and the editors' conviction is that most orientalistes were not driven by a scholarly mindset, but by imperialist, colonial and missionary

92 Azzavî 1941, 2.

93 Flöhr 2020, 45.

94 Özervarlı 2007, 77.

95 İstanbul Üniversitesi Edebiyat Fakültesi (ed.) 1940, 134–5.

96 Doğrul 1940–1944, 94–5.

97 *ibid.*

aims, making their work – including the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* – political in nature.⁹⁸ To prove this point, Fergan and his circle scrutinize other publications by orientalists in which they openly voice their imperialist and missionary intentions, such as *Aspects of Islam* by Duncan B. MacDonald (1863–1943), ‘the missionary who wrote the entry “Allah” in the Encyclopaedia of Islam.’⁹⁹ The introduction of this book in fact serves as a manual for missionaries, suggesting several strategies to enhance their efforts, which according to the editors are also implemented in the entry about ‘Allah,’¹⁰⁰ e.g. when MacDonald translates ‘al-Ğabbār,’ one of the 99 names attributed to Allah, as ‘tyrant.’¹⁰¹ Further orientalists making comments to the effect that Islam as a religion was incompatible with modern civilization are cited.¹⁰² Unsurprisingly, the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* is regarded as a highly flawed work containing misleading representations of Islamic religion and history and serving ideological and political purposes.

The nature of the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* and the question of who is qualified to produce reliable knowledge on Islam soon became the point of contention in a heated press debate with members of the translation committee at Istanbul University. Ahmet Ateş (1913–1966), member of the committee, praises the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* as a work by ‘Eastern and Western scholars’ (*Şarklı ve Garblı âlimler*) whose sole weakness lay in its relative outdatedness. In contrast, he criticizes the *İslâm-Türk Ansiklopedisi* as a ‘ram-shackle work’ that could never compete with the former.¹⁰³ Ateş was, at the same time, from 1938 onwards assistant to the German orientalist Hellmut Ritter (1892–1971), who had founded and was heading the Oriental Institute at Istanbul University for the study of Arabic, Persian and Urdu literature and sources about Turkish history.¹⁰⁴ Fergan repudiates the assertion that the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* was an inclusive project also containing expertise by ‘Eastern scholars,’ explaining that in fact only a very limited number of authors from the region such as Mehmed Fuad Köprülü had contributed to the work – who even themselves, just as some members of the translation committee, were aware of the conditions underlying the emergence of the reference work and its ideological implications, as their writings indicated.¹⁰⁵

Criticism is also directed against the prominent view expressed by the writer and literary historian İsmail Habib Sevük (1892–1954) that orientalists, as neutral and impartial outsiders, could produce more reliable knowledge about Islam than Muslims could about their own history and culture, and should thus be regarded as a touchstone for the studies and findings by Muslims. Fergan heavily attacks the depiction of Western

98 ‘Bağdathî Üstad Abbas Azzavî’ 1940, 4; Eşref Edib 1941, 4.

99 ‘İslâm Ansiklopedisinde “Allah” bahsini yazan misyoner kimdir?’ 1941, 2–3; MacDonald 1911.

100 ‘İslâm Ansiklopedisinde “Allah” bahsini yazan misyoner kimdir?’ 1941, 2–3.

101 ‘İslâm Ansiklopedisinde [sic] “Allah” bahsini yazan Mister Makdonald’ın hakikî hüviyeti ve Redaksiyon Heyetinden temennilerimiz’ 1941, 4.

102 Eşref Edib 1941, 4.

103 As cited in Eşref Edib 1941, 3.

104 Yazıcı 2010, 362.

105 Eşref Edib 1941, 3.

scholarship as an ‘impressive monument’ (*heybetli bir âbide*) and gift to Muslims which they needed in order to understand Islamic civilization.¹⁰⁶ This problematic and paternalistic view is why the creators of the *İslâm-Türk Ansiklopedisi* were so keen to demonstrate that non-Muslim orientalist were *not* impartial outsiders, but rather following their own specific agenda. Further, orientalist’s engagement with the Islamic religion and culture was nothing new, original or unique:

These disciplines the missionaries, orientalist and others engage with (*[m]üsteşriklerin ve misyonerlerin ve sairinin meşğul oldukları bu ilimler*), are disciplines we have been taking great pains over for centuries and centuries. A considerable part of those who bequeathed works in these disciplines (*bu ilimlere dair eser*) have been our own ancestors. We are heirs to their works. Before anybody else, it is incumbent on us to deal with these works. We must absolutely investigate all primary sources, manuscripts as well as prints. [...] Every study, every matter (*her etüdü, her meseleyi*) foreigners provide us about our own identity, we must unquestionably scrutinize and subject to a strict review. By adding our efforts to the efforts of others and nourishing the efforts of others with our own, we must demonstrate that we are a living and invigorating force in the world of scholarship (*ilim âleminde*). Peculiarly in those disciplines that concern our own identity (*özümüze müteallik ilimlerde*), we must avoid adorning ourselves with borrowed and foreign knowledge (*iğreti ve yabancı bilgi*). [...] Above all, especially in the disciplines that concern our own identity, it does not befit us to burden others. If we do so, they will not only mock us, but also throw us off their backs.¹⁰⁷

There is an allusion to the connection of orientalist’s expertise and power exercised over Muslim peoples when it is stated that reliance on their interpretive authority will lead to Muslims being ‘mocked’ and overthrown by them. At the same time, Fergan attempts to make visible Muslim scholars’ expertise and scholarly tradition, implicitly belittled in the introduction to the Turkish *İslâm Ansiklopedisi*, and to uphold that they are not extinct but still alive and an assertive and dynamic force to reckon with – even if the present power dynamics disadvantage them against orientalist and their knowledge production.

This is also a call to alienated Turkish intellectuals not to submit to them and adopt their views as this would constrict their perspective, e.g. through an uncritical transfer of categories of analysis and prevalent assumptions about Christianity to Islam with a ‘mentality that was completely estranged from us (*büsbütün yabancı bir zihniyetle*).’¹⁰⁸ This comes to the fore in a polemical exchange with the sociologist Niyazi Berkes (1908–1988). Berkes criticizes the *İslâm-Türk Ansiklopedisi* on the grounds that it exhibited a rational, reformist and apologetic approach to Islam which according to him obscured the ‘real’ religion practiced among the masses for centuries. The editors reply that Berkes’ views on Islam were solely based on his knowledge of Christian history and his ignorance of the Islamic one, which had undergone a completely different devel-

106 As cited in Eşref Edib 1942, 2.

107 *ibid.*, 2–3.

108 [Eşref Edip] 1941c, 4.

opment – the latter not being in need of subsequent rationalization and reformation, unlike Christianity.¹⁰⁹ The *ulema* pursue their goal of increasing their own visibility, claiming interpretive authority, and advocating for their perspectives not only through their encyclopaedia, but also by promoting other publications to be consulted by Turkish intellectuals. For instance, Sevük is encouraged to engage with reliable Quran commentaries by İzmirli, Doğrul or Elmalılı Muhammed Hamdi, the latter having been prepared under the auspices of the Diyanet, instead of using dubious translations from the French.¹¹⁰ Also, Muslim *ulema*'s long-standing tradition of engagement with orientalist scholarship is invoked, which authors such as Sevük oftentimes simply were not aware of, as they abstained from reading local authors.¹¹¹

Thus, there is outright rejection of orientalist's supposed scholarly authority and superiority. The creators of the alternative encyclopaedia challenge them on several levels, singling out themselves as the actual experts capable of 'identifying the principles of the Islamic creed in all their origins and their evolution' (*İslâm akidelerini, bütün asliyetleriyle ve bütün inkişaflarıyla tesbit etmeğe*)¹¹² and expressing that they can do without the ideologically biased insights of the former, invoking a rich tradition of their own.

They assert their own authority also in a polemical way e.g. as they belittle figures like Ateş, 'assistant to the orientalist Monsieur Ritter' (*müşteşrik mösyö Ritter'in muavini*),¹¹³ and imply that he had no right to claim adherence to scholarly and scientific principles while he succumbed to orientalist's indoctrination and denied Muslim scholars' expertise:

In his view, knowledge is exclusive to those people [Western orientalists and missionaries] (*ilim bunlara münhasırdır*) and can originate solely from their heads and investigations, whereas from true Turks and Muslims like us, not even knowledge on questions regarding their own identity (*kendi özlerine müteallik hususlarda [...] ilim*) can originate! [...] A suggestion to Ahmed Ateş [...]: He should not mock high-ranking professors who could be the teachers of his own teacher (*bocasının hocası olacak Ordinaryüs Profesörlerle*).¹¹⁴

This is probably exactly what bothers Ahmed Ateş, assistant and helper to orientalist Monsieur Ritter (*müşteşrik Mösyö Riterin [sic] asistanı, yardımcısı*), the most, and what leads him to fanatic attacks: that the men whom he acknowledges as masters (*üstad*) are overthrown one by one in the face of real scholarship (*hakikî ilim*).¹¹⁵

Fergan even goes so far as to accuse Ateş of being hostile to true scholarly efforts and knowledge per se: 'How can such a miserable mentality (*zavallı zihniyet*) prevail in scholarly environs (*[i]lmî muhit içinde*)?'¹¹⁶

109 *ibid.*

110 '«Avrupa edebiyatı ve biz» muharririne göre İslâm dini ve medeniyeti' 1942, 3.

111 Eşref Edib 1942c, 4.

112 [Eşref Edip] 1941c, 4.

113 Eşref Edib 1941b, 4.

114 Eşref Edib 1941, 3.

115 Eşref Edib 1941, 3.

116 Eşref Edib 1941b, 4.

To sum up, the *ulema* and intellectuals critical of the translation project display several techniques to perform expertise, both to *assert* their own, and to *deny* their adversaries' expertise: On the first level, they resort to strategies to display the diversity, comprehensiveness and multifacetedness of their team and work, such as featuring biographical data and credentials with a focus on both a rich long-standing tradition and innovations undertaken in their field by themselves, demonstrating the complexity of their field as well as their international impact, connections and recognition. On the second level, they apply strategies such as a concrete critique of methods and insights produced by orientalist and a presentation of alternatives, as well as an analysis of orientalist's political and ideological aims and of power dynamics shaping the production of knowledge at the expense of Muslim *ulema* in order to question notions of neutrality. Another relevant strategy here is the challenging and questioning of alleged 'universalisms' imposed by orientalist which, in their view, distort Turkish intellectuals' perspective on Islamic religion and history. In Carr's terms, the actors thus enact expertise through linguistic tools such as the use of a variety of self-designating terms emphasizing their authority, names of institutions as credentials, technical terms and jargon of their complex field, or invoking their connections to other experts to reinforce their authority.

4. The Quest for Recognition – and Responsibilities

The previous discussion has made clear that the criticism of orientalist scholarship merged with a criticism of actors in Turkey ranging from academia to politics, who were regarded as their representatives and aides after orientalist had been successful in spreading their perspectives in Muslim countries e.g. by founding educational institutions attended by locals and publishing books which were widely broadcast and read.¹¹⁷

The criticism against local actors was gradually concretized and targeted several institutions. Initially, it was mainly directed against the academic translation committee: How could it consider entries such as the one about 'Allah,' given MacDonald's imperialistic and missionary aims and his promoted propaganda methods, to be scholarly products, and publish them without any significant comments?¹¹⁸ The committee members' competence, as well as their methods and criteria in the selection of articles to be translated, revised, or rewritten, are questioned, demanding transparency regarding this policy.¹¹⁹ Although the committee should, as was right and proper, scrutinize each and every entry, which would make their endeavour a respected one beyond Turkey and even in the West, according to their critics, it was arbitrarily rewriting some entries, while ignoring the core of the encyclopaedia:

117 Eşref Edib 1942b, 3.

118 'İslâm Ansiklopedisinde "Allah" bahsini yazan misyoner kimdir?' 1941, 2–3.

119 'İslâm Ansiglopedisinde [sic] "Allah" bahsini yazan Mister Makdonald'ın hakikî hüviyeti ve Redaksiyon Heyetinden temennilerimiz' 1941, 3–4.

Even though the committee convened at Istanbul University has grasped the task it has been entrusted with, it pretends it has not, and refrains from performing it. It contents itself with rewriting a couple of arbitrarily selected entries, while refraining from instructing Turkish-Islamic authors (*Türk-İslâm muharrirlerine*) to rewrite the Islamic entries which are the main focus of the work (*eserin sîket merkezini teşkil eden*). This is why it does not want to introduce itself and prefers to remain anonymous.¹²⁰

More specifically, Diyanet president Yaltkaya, who is identified as the committee's Islam expert (*İslâmiyat mütehasısı*), as he had rewritten some less relevant Islamic articles such as that on *Amin* (Amen), is asked about the reasons for his selection of these specific ones and his neglect of others. In addition, he is accused of not consulting and engaging other experts – alluding to the *ulema* critical of the regime.¹²¹

They say: «We don't have ulema (*ülemamız*) who could write these articles. Therefore, we are compelled to include writings by missionaries.» What kind of excuse is this? Are Muslims dependent on the benevolence of missionaries now to learn about their creed? We are convinced that, thank God, you can find a lot of Muslim and Turkish scholars (*İslâm ve Türk âlimi*) in our country who could teach even those missionaries. We wonder: whom did the editorial board appeal to, who subsequently declined their request?¹²²

The Ministry of Education, which initiated the official translation project, also became a target. A record of a meeting between the Minister of Education, Hasan Âli Yücel, and Fergan in 1946 indicates that government circles carefully observed the alternative encyclopaedia project and were suspicious of their editors, visible in attempts to ban other publications by Fergan.¹²³ Fergan even mentions that at an earlier stage, the Ministry actually purchased and distributed 150 copies of the fascicles of the *İslâm-Türk Ansiklopedisi*, responding to impassioned appeals about the national importance of the work – a practice it sadly discontinued later on.¹²⁴ The publishers of the rival encyclopaedia still claim that their 'criticism was very useful in moving the editorial committee to a more careful course of action.'¹²⁵ The above-mentioned press debates with well-known public figures in fact testify to the broader impact of their project.

However, when trying to increase their own visibility, the dissident *ulema* and intellectuals frequently point out the scarcity of their means to pursue their goals of reviving and spreading Islamic knowledge as a small team dependent on private means and readers:

Unfortunately, this initiative was undertaken out of dire necessity. Until now, a giant work of this kind has not been initiated by the state or any company or asso-

120 'Ma'bud "İslâm Ansiklopedisi"nin başındaki hey'etin işi nedir?' 1941, 3.

121 'Müstegriklerin islâm ansiklopedisinde islâmî meslelerin [sic] telif hissesi' 1941, 3–4.

122 'İslâm Ansiklopedisinde [sic] "Allah" bahsini yazan Mister Makdonald'ın hakikî hüviyeti ve Redaksiyon Heyetinden temennilerimiz' 1941, 4.

123 E. Edib 1946b, 7.

124 [Eşref Edip] 1946c, 3.

125 E. Edib 1946b, 7.

ciation, and there is no hope or chance whatsoever of it being initiated, making it essential that it is accomplished [by us] for the honor of Muslims and Turks (*müslümanlık [sic] ve Türklüğün şerefi*) and in the name of *Islamic-Turkish* scholarship and knowledge (*İslâm-Türk ilim ve irfanı*). After the publication of a trilingual work in Europe under the protection of missionary societies with access to millions of liras, [...] titled «Encyclopaedia of Islam» [...], including several allegations, slander, distortions, and other assaults irreconcilable with scholarship (*ilimle hiç münasebeti olmıyan*), it became a fundamental responsibility of Turkish society to publish a great *Islamic-Turkish Encyclopaedia* written by *Islamic-Turkish* scholars (*İslâm-Türk uleması*) informing on the true principles of Islam, true *Islamic-Turkish* history, and the true *Islamic-Turkish* existence (*hakiki müslümanlık esasatını, hakiki İslâm-Türk tarihini, hakiki İslâm-Türk varlığını*). This imperative compelled us to embark upon this magnificent endeavour! [...] So far, we have carried out this task solely with the support of our esteemed readers. In the future, God willing, we will continue it with this support.¹²⁶

The criticism against Yaltkaya, deemed unsuitable for the position of Diyanet president, the Ministry of Education, as well as against Ateş, ‘assistant to the orientalist Monsieur Ritter’ at Istanbul University, indicates that in the discussion surrounding the encyclopaedias and their specific entries, not only an intellectual dispute is at stake, but concrete (occupational) positions and access to institutions, financial means and opportunities to exert influence.

Even though in the early 1940s, due to the repressive environment, requests in this direction could not openly be stated, they were implicit in the *ulema*’s self-confident positioning as real experts against office holders in state institutions whom they considered incompetent. In the late 1940s, with the onset of the democratization process and more possibilities to discuss questions regarding religion and religious institutions, these *ulema* formulated their political demands more explicitly. In fact, the journal’s final issues became an influential platform for their participation in the public debate. Thus, the earlier stage, with frequent invocations of their expertise, legitimized by references to their credentials, as well as warnings against the impact of orientalist’s misleading works on uninformed Turkish writers,¹²⁷ was a fruitful ground for the later stage, when they demanded very concrete responsibilities e.g. in the field of religious education. In several journal articles, the *ulema* argued that, as the only scholarly authority commanding the necessary expertise, they were the ones to take on the leadership in the conceptualization of religious education and institutions of religious learning, ‘even though on our end, when it’s about religion, anybody who can hold a pen suddenly turns into a know-it-all (*bilgiç*).’¹²⁸

This is also why, when finally in 1947, one of the contributors of the *İslâm-Türk Ansiklopedisi*, Akseki, is appointed Diyanet president after Yaltkaya’s death, there is great excitement and joy among the editors, who dedicate poems to him and portray

126 [Eşref Edip] 1946c, 2.

127 Eşref Edib 1942b, 3; Eşref Edib 1942c, 4.

128 Yörükân 1948, 2.

him as the third Diyanet president, but ‘undeniably the first in terms of his official career (*resmî hayatı*), the significance of his scholarship (*ilmi kıymeti*), and his sublime character (*yüksek karakteri*).’¹²⁹ This appointment is seen as a step in the right direction, reflected in an exemplary fashion by Akseki’s official embrace of the *İslâm-Türk Ansiklopedisi* in 1948, when he sends a note to *muftis* all over the country to prompt them to obtain new subscribers and to persuade the community of the importance of this fundamental work, unique in the whole Islamic world. Although Akseki regrets that the Diyanet, due to a lack of means, could not fund the publication,¹³⁰ under his auspices, the demand to state organs to support the work¹³¹ becomes reality.

5. Conclusion

As has been shown, the debates surrounding three competing encyclopaedias were a welcome opportunity for former Ottoman *ulema* and intellectuals to ‘enact expertise’ and claim interpretive authority over Islam and to mobilize it for political demands regarding their own position and responsibilities. In their claim to expertise, they resort to their own tradition and history, invoking different aspects of it: On the one hand, they draw on a century-old tradition of classical Islamic scholarship, and on the other, on their more recent attempts to bring classical Islamic disciplines such as *kalâm* or educational institutions such as *medreses* in line with modern intellectual developments and debates. Therefore, by recalling their experiences in this regard, and demonstrating their engagement with transregional scholarly debates both in the West and in other parts of the Islamic world, they establish not only an ancient-yet-modern tradition of in-depth expertise, but also its complexity, comprehensiveness and multifacetedness. It is a key concern of theirs to emphasize this and to contrast it with the flawed works of politically motivated orientalisists, as much is at stake: Many Turkish intellectuals, just for the reason of their being non-Muslim and thus allegedly ‘neutral’ authorities on Islam, favoured Western orientalisists over local scholars, who had been marginalized institutionally and socially both in the late Ottoman Empire and in the Republic.

There are several strategies available to the latter on two levels, aimed firstly at *asserting* their own expertise and secondly at *denying* expertise to their rivals, the orientalisists. This includes invoking their own biographies and credentials, the complexity of their field, or their international connections on the one hand, and an analysis of methods, political agendas, power dynamics and alleged neutrality and universalisms on the other. Different self-designations of the *ulema* and intellectuals involved, such as *ulema*, *mütebassis*, *ilim adamı*, *üstad*, *profesör* or *mütefekkir*, are also an indication of the multiple dimensions they ascribe to ‘their kind of expertise.’

129 Miras 1947, 9.

130 Büyüker 2018, 239.

131 [Eşref Edip] 1946c, 3.

My case study clearly demonstrates that ‘enactment of expertise’ as a ‘communicative practice [...] is never insulated nor isolated from institution and ideology’¹³² and takes place within existing power dynamics. Through their discourse, the *ulema* not only positioned themselves within a broader Ottoman and early Republican tradition of responding to distorted representations of Islam by orientalists. They also counteracted the ascription of expertise to orientalists in order to demand more resources, responsibilities, and power for themselves in the long run – which was closely related to the fear that the last generation of Ottoman *ulema* was slowly disappearing, and a break with the Ottoman intellectual tradition and institutions for Islamic learning and teaching underway.¹³³ Through a self-conscious invocation of their history, they rebuked figures such as the above-mentioned Banguoğlu, who warned against a ‘*medrese* mentality’ and laid claim to a reform of religious education on his own: There was no need for his dubious initiatives and ideas; a look into the curricula of the modernized Ottoman *medreses* was enough, which just awaited reviving under the auspices of already available experts – former Ottoman *ulema*.¹³⁴

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In the following, I will use these abbreviations:

İslâm-Türk Ansiklopedisi – İTA.

İslâm-Türk Ansiklopedisi Mecmuası – İTAM.

Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı – TDV.

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132 Carr 2010, 27.

133 Bein 2011, 149–51; Lord 2018, 100–1. See Kara 2017, 138–52 for a report from 1950 on the state of religious education in which Akseki expresses this fear. This report also demonstrates that many of the arguments initially proposed by the editors of the *İslâm-Türk Ansiklopedisi* remained relevant throughout the 1950s.

134 ‘Manasız ve fuzulî bir teşebbüs. Tahsin Banguoğlu’nun kendi kendine verdiği paye’. 1948, 10–1.

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