Homer, Troy and the Turks: Heritage & identity in the Late Ottoman Empire 1870-1915

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IV
Homer and Troy in Ottoman Literature: an Overview
Frontispiece of Na’im Fraşeri, *Ilyada. Eser-i Homer*, Istanbul 1885 or 1886. This is the first attempt to translate the *Iliad* into Ottoman Turkish. Na’im Fraşeri, born in Frashër now in modern Albania, was a civil servant with the Ottoman Ministry of Education. His prose translation of the First Book of the *Iliad* - a booklet of 43 pages - has a 15-page foreword in which he introduces the *Iliad*, Homer and Troy in some detail (Photo Günay Uslu, 2010).
Paris’ betrayal (...) led to a war. Rulers of Greece and surroundings, led by Agamemnon (...), attacked Troy and besieged the town for ten years. After numerous and heavy battles during that period, they succeeded in conquering it by the trick devised by Ulysses. Ulysses had ordered the construction of a huge wooden horse. In the horse’s belly he had hidden a selection of the bravest soldiers. Then he sent the Trojans the message: ‘we are leaving now for our countries, but we leave behind this wooden horse as a souvenir of the battles’. The Trojans pulled the horse into the town. (...) at nightfall the soldiers hidden in the horse’s belly came out and let the other soldiers in as well, they destroyed the town and defeated and killed its citizens.

Agamemnon was the most eminent of the rulers of the Achaeans, the bravest was Achilles, the cleverest Odysseus and the most eloquent was Nestor.1 The greatest hero of the Trojans was Hector, the brave and unequalled son of Priam, Aeneas was the most heroic royal after him.

Although repeatedly translated into European languages, the fact that these two famous, valuable and old works have still not been translated into the Ottoman language is a reason for grief. Therefore, I started at once to translate, print and publish, step by step, the aforementioned work from its original language.

Na’im Fraşeri, Ilyada. Eser-i Homer (İstanbul 1303/1885-1886) preface, 5-7, translated from Ottoman.

As far as we know, there was no Ottoman-Turkish version of the poems of Homer until 1885.2 Na’im Fraşeri’s abovementioned words in his preface to his translation of the first song of the Iliad (İlyada. Eser-i Homer) confirm this view. Although Ottoman-Turks knew Troy and Homer long before, they clearly did not feel an urgent need to translate Homeric poems into Ottoman Turkish until the nineteenth century. Heinrich Schliemann’s archaeological activities in Troy from the 1870s onwards, obviously triggered Ottoman interest in Homeric literature. But the nineteenth-century intellectual modernizations, the progress in public education, the rise of printing and publishing and the innovations within the Ottoman literature also created suitable conditions in which Homer and mythology could enter Ottoman art, culture and literature.

1 The author uses both Roman and Greek designations.
2 Parts of this chapter, including figures and captions, have been published in: Günay Uslu, ‘Homer and Troy in 19th century Ottoman Turkish Literature’, in: Jorrit Kelder, Günay Uslu, Ömer Faruk Şerifoğlu (eds.), Troy. City, Homer and Turkey (Zwolle 2012) 143-150.
Indeed, literary attention given to Homeric epics, such as translation attempts of the *Iliad* into Ottoman-Turkish, biographical notes on the poet, informative articles in Ottoman periodicals and newspapers on Homeric literature and the topographical characteristics of Homeric locations, occurred in an era that was characterized by an increasing penetration of Western works as well as ancient Greek and Roman works into Ottoman literature.

For all the interest and enthusiasm, however, not one complete Turkish version of Homeric literature has been produced in the Ottoman Empire. Obviously, the translators were pioneers and undoubtedly experienced the complexities involved. This chapter will deal with the interest in Homer in the new Ottoman literary era – in particular from the 1850s onwards – until the second constitutional period (1908). However, to get a better understanding of the role of Homer in Ottoman literature and to position the rising interest of the Ottoman intellectuals in Homeric epics in the late Ottoman Empire, it might be useful to take a brief look at the early Ottoman interest in Homer and Troy and the literary developments in the nineteenth century.

1. **Early Ottoman-Turkish interest in Homeric epics**

Ottoman-Turks were no strangers to Troy, Homer and Homeric literature. In fact, Sultan Mehmed II, the conqueror of Constantinople (1432-1481), was greatly interested in Homer and Troy and the collection of his personal library within the Topkapı Sarayı includes a valuable Greek edition of the *Iliad* (fig. 1). The collections of the libraries in Istanbul also include medieval Arabic manuscripts dealing with the story of the Trojan horse and ‘the tricks of sovereigns’. A copy of one of these manuscripts was completed in 1475, probably commissioned by Sultan Mehmed II.

Sultan Mehmed II’s identification with the Trojans in order to obtain historical

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3 Collection Mehmed II’s library, Topkapı Sarayı Museum, Istanbul, GI2.
legitimacy has already been mentioned in chapter 1, yet it might be illuminating to refresh our memory on this subject. As it says in the official chronicle written by Michael Kritoboulos, Mehmed II praised Homer and admired the ruins of the ancient city during his visit to Troy in 1462. Subsequently, he identified himself with the Trojans and – referring to the conquest of Constantinople in 1453 – celebrated the victory of ‘us’ Asians over the descendants of the ‘Greeks, Macedonians and Thessalians and Peloponnesians’.\(^5\)

Probably the Turks knew Homer even before the era of Sultan Mehmed II and the Renaissance. At least they were familiar with some mythical figures and events from Homeric literature. The epic stories of the heroic age of the Turkish tribe of the Oğuz that make up the Book of Dede Korkut include narratives which are analogous to Homeric poems. These mythic narratives dealing with morals, values, pre-Islamic beliefs and athletic skills of the Turkic people, had been orally transmitted for centuries before they were recorded, probably in the fifteenth century. The episode in which the Oğuz hero Basat kills the cyclop-like figure Tepegöz – who had been terrorizing the Oğuz realm – is a creative adaptation of Odysseus’ struggle with Polyphemus.\(^6\) Similarly the epic Alpamish (Alpamış), which most probably existed during the period of Turkic Kaghanate as early as the sixth to eighth century in Central Asia, includes Homeric aspects.\(^7\)


Interest in Homer and Troy is also noticeable in the periods following the Renaissance. In this context the comprehensive seventeenth-century history *Camiu’d – dāvel* (The Compendium of Nations) in Arabic and its Ottoman-Turkish version *Sahaif-ül Ahbar* (The pages of the Chronicle) of the Ottoman astronomer, astrologer and historian Ahmed Dede Müneccimbasi (1631-1702), is worth mentioning. Characterizing the Trojan War as the most important episode in the Greek history, the work deals with the location and history of Troy.\(^8\)

Another famous work dealing with Troy was *Cihannümä* by Mustafa ibn Abdullah, better known as the prominent Ottoman scholar Katib Çelebi (1609-1657). This abundantly illustrated important work on geography, topography, history and astronomy based on a synthesis of Islamic and western sources, was written in the seventeenth century, yet printed in 1732 in Istanbul. A version of the story of Troy, most probably after the example of a middle Greek/Byzantine narrative and written by Ebu Bekir ibn Behram ed-Dimeşki (d. 1691), was included in the publication.\(^9\)

Furthermore, in *Tarih-i Iskender bin Filipos* (History of Alexander the son of Philip), published in 1838 and reprinted in 1877, and in an Ottoman-Turkish translation of Flavius Arrianus’ (89-145/146 AD) *Anabasis Alexandrou*, Troy and Homeric characters were again given particular attention. After dealing with Alexander’s arrival in Troy, the translator, most probably George Rhasis (no information on dates of birth and death), pays special attention to the circumstances in which Priam, Achilles and Hector died and informs his readers about the enmity between the races of Priam and Neoptolemos. By doing so the author presumably tried to make his narrative more understandable for his

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\(^8\) Ahmed Dede Müneccimbäşi was the court astrologer of Mehmed IV (1642-1693). The Turkish version of *Camiu’d – dâvel* is a summary translation made by a commission led by the prominent poet Ahmed Nedim during the reign of Sultan Ahmed III (1673-1736): the so-called tulip era with a culmination of arts, culture and architecture. The work is based on Arab, Persian, Turkish and European sources. It is assumed that Roman and Jewish sources were also used for this universal history, source: [http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/397479/Ahmed-Dede-Muneccimbasi](http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/397479/Ahmed-Dede-Muneccimbasi) (19/08/2013); Kreiser, ‘Troia un die Homerischen Epen. Von Mehmet II. Bis İsmet İnönü’, 282.

Ottoman readers. The book was published in Cairo. Consequently, one may wonder if it truly reached Ottoman readers in the capital or other large cities of the Empire.¹⁰

Soon after in Istanbul, too, a work dealing with ancient Greek history including Homer and Troy appeared: *Tarih-i Kudema-yi Yunan ve Makedonya* (History of Ancient Greek and Macedonia), written by Agrıbozı Melek Ahmed (presumably between 1851-1861) during the reign of Sultan Abdülmecit.¹¹ Furthermore, with the publication of *Tarih-i Yunanistan-ı Kadim* (The Ancient History of Greece) in 1870, the reading public in Istanbul and surroundings were amply given another opportunity to learn in great detail about ancient Greek geography, people, authors, heroes and mythology.¹²

Classical Philosophers in the Ottoman Islamic Culture

The Ottomans knew Homer also through Medieval Persian and in particular Arabic studies of ancient works. As Manguel points out, it was as a result of the Arabic interest in classical Greek literature in the Middle Ages that ‘almost the entire corpus of Greek and Hellenistic philosophy and science’ had been translated into Syriac and Arabic. He maintains, moreover, that in prominent places of Islamic culture, such as Baghdad, Cairo and Damascus, ‘Greek literature was perceived as a dialogue between contemporaries’ and that Aristotle and Plato ‘were active voices in constant dialogue with their readers, readers who were also their promulgators and conveyors through translation and commentary’. Classical philosophers as Socrates, Plato and Aristotle were considered to be important figures within Islam; they were seen as legendary characters of an Islamic era. Under these circumstances, some Arabic scholars

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¹⁰ Kitab-i Tarih-i Iskender bin Filipos (Cairo 10/Ra/1234) (03/06/1838) Tarih-i Iskender bin Filipos (Cairo 1294/1877); See for an account of the original work, the identity of the translator and the circumstances under which the translation was made, and its reception among others: Süheyla Yüksel, Türk Edebiyatında Yunan Antikitesi (1860-1908) (Sivas 2010) 23-35 and Johann Strauss (1995), ‘The Millets and the Ottoman Language: The Contribution of Ottoman Greeks to Ottoman Letters (19th-20th centuries)’, *Die Welt des Islams*. New Series, 35/2 (November 1995) 203-207.


¹² Yüksel, Türk Edebiyatında Yunan Antikitesi, 30-38; Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar, XIX. Asır Türk Edebiyatı Tarihi (Istanbul 1956) 140; Taceddin Kayaoğlu, Türkiyede Tercüme Müesseseleri (Istanbul 1998) 81.
were even accused of preferring Aristotle to the Koran in the 9th century. And Plato, as the historian Tokel highlights, was even considered to be a prophet by several Islamic scholars.

As a part of, and, for a long time, as rulers of the Islamic world, the Ottomans had access to these medieval Arabic studies of ancient Greek literature. Gradually, ancient philosophy became a major part of the Ottoman political and cultural world as well and, as historian Cemal Kafadar points out, classical figures such as Plato, Aristotle, Hippocrates and Galen became the basic classics of the Ottoman Islamic culture.

Homer was known as the ‘wandering poet’ in the Muslim world. Although poetry was not the main focus of the Arabic studies, Arabic translations of ancient works (mainly philosophy) included fragments and quotes of Homer. His biographies, moreover, were included in dictionaries and encyclopaedias. The influential Muslim philosopher Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406), for instance, informs his readers in his Al-Muqaddimah (Prolegomenon) (1377) that ‘Aristotle, in his logic, praises the poet Umayrash [Homer]’. It is widely accepted that Ibn Khaldun was a vital source of inspiration for significant Ottoman scholars such as Katip Çelebi (1609-1657) and Mustafa Naima (1655-1716).

The Search for Change in Ottoman Literature

We may assume that Ottoman-Turks knew Homer and Homeric subjects and figures. Still, no Ottoman-Turkish version of Homer’s pagan gods and goddesses was produced until the nineteenth-century reforms and modernizations. As

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Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar, an authority on Turkish literature, maintains, ‘with the Tanzimat edict of 1839 the Empire and the society left a circle of civilization in which it had lived for centuries and declared its entrance into another civilization’, the Western European one, which it had been in conflict with for centuries. The government explicitly accepted European values and the basic principles of the Enlightenment, moreover, it made modernization a state programme. The reforms and changes in political, economical and social life triggered the search for change in Ottoman literature.\textsuperscript{18}

The nineteenth century Ottoman literature – \textit{New Ottoman (Turkish) Literature} or \textit{Tanzimat Literature} – became interwoven with Western literature.\textsuperscript{19} Particularly from the second half of the nineteenth century onwards, European forms of literature were included into the canon of Ottoman literary genres. Educating the public in ideas taken from the west was a major concern of the literary scene of this era, which through their schooling and linguistic capacities was dominated by Tanzimat-statesmen, civil bureaucrats and intellectuals educated in new western-type schools. The authors of the \textit{New Ottoman Literature} used their work as an instrument for public instruction. In fact, through the newly introduced western-style literary genres, such as the novel, drama, poetry, philosophical dialogue and the essay, new ideas were introduced, but also interpreted and discussed for the reading public.\textsuperscript{20}


\textsuperscript{19} The historians of Turkish literature call the period between 1839 and 1923 above all the era of the \textit{New Ottoman (Turkish) Literature} or the \textit{Tanzimat Literature}. However, because of the radical political and cultural changes and its effects on literature, the proclamation of the second constitutional monarchy in 1908 is considered a turning point within this era. See: Enginün, \textit{Yeni Türk Edebiyatı Tanzimat’tan Cumhuriyet’e}, preface 9, 5-27; Süheyla Yüksel, \textit{Türk Edebiyatında Yunan Antikitesi} (1860-1908), preface VII, 1. For the history of the literature of the late Ottoman Empire, its various movements and leading figures, see also: Tanpınar, \textit{XIX. Asır Türk Edebiyatı Tarihi}; Berna Moran, \textit{Türk Romanına Eleştirel bir Bakış}, 2, (Istanbul 1987-90); O. Ahmet Evin, \textit{Origins and Development of the Turkish Novel} (Minneapolis 1983); P. Robbert Finn, \textit{The Early Turkish Novel 1872-1900} (Istanbul 1984) and Kenan Akyüz, ‘La Littérature Moderne de Turquie, \textit{Philologia Turcicae Fundamenta}, ii, (Wiesbaden 1964) 465-634; see also: İlber Ortaylı, \textit{Imparatorluğun En Uzun Yüzyılı} (Istanbul 2005) 225-257.

\textsuperscript{20} Enginün, \textit{Yeni Türk Edebiyatı Tanzimat’tan Cumhuriyet’e}, 25, 32.
2. New Ottoman Literature
Educati ng the Public and Changing Perceptions

Helen, only 18 years old, a prominent figure of her time, deserved to be described as the personification of love. Is it possible that the longing, the coquetry and entreats of a person deep in love, as Paris was, would not affect such a beauty that was wholly created of desire, fertility and affection? Would the laws of human nature allow this?

In his work, the Iliad, the leading poet Homer composed the historical [Trojan] war in the form of a verse. I, a humble translator, had a strong desire to translate this story by retaining the original language of it as much as possible. No, it is not a disgrace! In my opinion it is fairer to strengthen a strong desire to improve public instruction than to remove the impetus.

Selanikli Hilmi, Iylas yahud şair-i şehir Omiros (Istanbul 1316/1898-1899) introduction, z, yd, ye, translated from Ottoman.

As Selanikli Hilmi emphasizes in the preface to his translation of the first book of Homer’s the Iliad, the improvement of public instruction was the main purpose of the Ottoman literary production after the declaration of the Tanzimat edict (fig. 2). The aim to contribute to public instruction was in its turn strongly related to the circumstances in which the reformations were introduced. In a time of weakness and disintegration, leading figures of the Ottoman society tried to save the Empire by these huge modernizations. Authors of literary texts, as Inci Enginün points out, played a major role in the dissemination of the principles of the Tanzimat to the population. Since the reforms were not founded on a broad intellectual movement, individual writers felt the need to contribute to a revival of Ottoman society. Therefore, the literature of this period was strongly interrelated with social matters. Newspapers and periodicals, moreover, functioned as a kind of widespread instrument for education and the maintenance of the modernizations and had a most important impact on literary life and individual writers. The reading public, correspondingly, had high expectations from newspapers and periodicals.21

21 Enginün, Yeni Türk Edebiyati Tanzimat’tan Cumhuriyet’e, 22, 25, 32; Uygur Kocabaşoğlu and
However, freedom of the press was extremely limited in the new literary era until 1908. Even so, in conjunction with the modernizations, the progress in public education and the increased literacy, the press also expanded speedily during this period. The number of publications increased and periodicals and newspapers reached a much wider public than in the past. However, during the reign of Abdülhamid II (1876-1908) writing on political matters was gradually made impossible. Words such as republic, revolution, anarchy, socialism, constitution, equality, nation, justice, native, coup, freedom, bomb, explosion, strike and assassination had become strictly forbidden. As a result, banished from political issues, newspapers and periodicals were forced to concentrate on technology, science, geography, history and literature.

Modern cultural life had steadily entered the main cities of the Empire, such as Istanbul, Izmir and Thessalonica. The changing cultural sphere triggered many discussions. Supporters and opponents incorporated their views in prose, poems, novels and theatre plays. In this context, Tanpınar stresses that the nineteenth-

23 The increasing literacy was partly the result of public initiatives. State-sponsored schools at different levels emerged in the late nineteenth century. As a consequence, the literacy rate of the Muslim Ottoman population, which was about 2-3 percent in the early nineteenth century, increased to approximately 15 percent in the final years of the Empire. See: Donald Quataert, The Ottoman Empire 1700-1922 (Cambridge 2005) 169. For a comprehensive treatment of the progress in Turkish public education see: Osman Ergin, Türkiye Maarif Tarihi, 5 vols. (Istanbul 1939-43). See also: Iskit, Türkiye’de Neyriyat Haraketlerine bir Bakış, 93-97; Vahdettin Engin, 1868 den 1923’e Mekteb-i Sultanı (Istanbul 2003), Bernard Lewis, The Emergence of Modern Turkey (New York – Oxford 2002) 179-184; Niyazi Berkes, Türkiye’de Çağdaşlaşma (Ankara 1973) 202-216.
25 Iskit, Türkiye’de Matbuat Rejimleri, 65.
26 Zürcher, Turkey. A Modern History, 78.
century literature was the production of a period of ‘civilization struggle’. 27

Translations of Neoclassical Works: New Perspectives on the Ancients

The starting point of the creators of the New Ottoman Literature was Western literature. 28 Various Western works of science, philosophy and literature were translated into the Ottoman language. The growing reception of European culture was strongly related to the establishment of institutions such as the Tercüme Odası (Translation Chamber) (1832), the Encümen-i Daniş (Imperial Academy of Arts and Sciences) (1850/51), the Cemiyet-i İlimye-i Osmaniye (Ottoman Scientific Society) (1860) and the various newspapers and periodicals in the second half of the nineteenth century. 29

On the other hand, intellectuals – whether connected to these institutions or not – also translated Western works on their own initiative. 30 In fact, translating was a way to learn a foreign language or to practise that particular language. 31 In their selections, Ottoman intellectuals primarily preferred the important literary figures of the French neoclassical period, like Racine, Molière, Corneille and La Fontaine. 32 As a result French literature and its various movements were

27 Tanpınar, XIX. Asır Türk Edebiyatı Tarihi, 16.

28 Although Western literature took a dominant position, literary figures of the period did not reject classic Turkish poetry, traditional popular literature or pre-Islamic Turkish literature. In fact, these traditional elements were also part of the new literature, sometimes as a source of inspiration and sometimes as a point of criticism: Enginün, Yeni Türk Edebiyatı Tanzimat’tan Cumhuriyet’e, 25-27.


30 It is generally believed that the coordination of the translations was not well organized by the state. As a result of this, the literary production of this period is highly diverse. The selection of translated works was usually based on individual preference and popularity, and the main concern was the content instead of form or style. Nevertheless, institutions such as the Translation Chambers, Encümen-i Danış and Cemiyet-i İlimye-yi Osmaniye, besides their significant role in the Ottoman cultural life and the translation activities, certainly played some role in the regulation of the translations. See: Tanpınar, XIX. Asır Türk Edebiyatı Tarihi, 139-141, 263-266, 270-273; Yüksel, Türk Edebiyatında Yunan Antikitesi, 3; Johann Strauss, ‘Romanlar, ah! O Romanlar! Les débuts de la lecture moderne dans l’Empire ottoman (1850-1900)’, Turcica. Revue d’Etudes Turques, 26, (1994) 125-163; Ortaylı, İmperatorlukun en uzun yüzülyı, 244-254. See for a detailed survey on Ottoman translation institutions also: Taceddin Kayaoğlu, Türkiyede Tercüme Müesseseleri (Istanbul 1998) and Berrin Aksoy, ‘Translation activities in the Ottoman Empire’, Meta, 50/3, (2005), 949-956.

31 Tanpınar, XIX. Asır Türk Edebiyatı Tarihi, 263-265.

particularly influential. A distinct preference for philosophical works was also noticeable. In this framework, it is important to underline the popularity of Münif Paşa’s biographies of ancient philosophers among Muslim intellectuals of the time.

Given the dominant position of the culture of ancient Greece and Rome within neoclassical works, Ottoman preference for these works resulted in an increasing influence of the ancients and classical mythology in the Ottoman literature and arts. Correspondingly, intellectuals at the basis of the new literary movement frequently referred to Greek antiquity in their essays and prefaces to their publications.

The incorporation of significant French neoclassical works in their literature gave Ottoman-Turks the opportunity to enrich their hitherto dominant Islamic views on classical authors. In fact it inspired them to compare Islamic views with newly acquired Western perceptions. By doing so, Ottomans were able to see ancient works in a different light and to revaluate the ancients from another perspective.

This fresh perspective on the ancients triggered the Ottoman desire to translate and read ancient Greek authors even more. One of the most popular classical figures of ancient Greece among Ottoman readers was Aesop. Many literary adaptations of Aesop’s fables were published in this era. The interest in Aesop’s fables was related to the Ottoman focus on educating the public and

33 Enginün, Yeni Türk Edebiyatı Tanzimat’tan Cumhuriyet’e, 25-27; Tanpınar, XIX. Asır Türk Edebiyatı Tarihi, 263-266, 270-273; Yüksel, Türk Edebiyatında Yunan Antikitesi, 3.

34 Published under the title ‘History of Greek Philosophers’ in the issues of the periodical Mecmua-i Fünun from nr 13 to 45 in the 1860s; see Strauss, ‘The Millets and the Ottoman Language: The Contribution of Ottoman Greeks to Ottoman Letters (19th-20th centuries)’, 189-249, 217-219, 221, see also Bedri Mermutlu, ‘Multi-Perception of the Enlightenment Thinking in Nineteenth Century Turkey’, 177 and Yüksel, Türk Edebiyatında Yunan Antikitesi, 8.

35 Yüksel, Türk Edebiyatında Yunan Antikitesi, 2-4.

36 Melin Has-er, Tanzimat Devrinde Latin ve Grek Antikitesi ile İlgili Neşriyat (1254-1300 Seneleri Arasında Neşredilen Kitaplar ve Muhtelif Mecmualarda Çıkan Yazılar) Unpublished Bachelor’s Thesis, Istanbul University, Faculty of Arts, Department of Turkology (Istanbul 1959) 100. The thesis is authoritative on the subject and is quoted often by scholars such as Toker, Türk Edebiyatında Nev Yunanilik and Neşe Demirci, “‘Mitoloji ve Şiir’in İzinde Ahmet Midhat Efendi’nin Mitolojiye Dair Görüşleri”, TÜBAR, Türklik Bilimi Araştırmaları, 9, (2011) 103-120; Yüksel, Türk Edebiyatında Yunan Antikitesi, 2-4, 18 and Badak, Battılılaşma Sürecinde Çok Yönlü Bir Osmanlı Aydını Münif Paşa, 289, 362-368, 397.

37 Strauss, ‘Who Read What in the Ottoman Empire (19th-20th centuries)?’, 1, 39-76, 50.
young people in particular. The great success of the translation of Fénelon’s novel *Les Aventures de Télémaque*, already mentioned in chapter 2 in the context of the intellectual developments within the Empire, was also clearly connected with the didactic power of the work.\(^{38}\) The educational travels of Telemachus, the son of Odysseus, was reading material in Ottoman schools.\(^{39}\)

The first translation of *Télémaque* into Ottoman Turkish (1859, printed in 1862), made by the prominent statesman and Grand Vizier Yusuf Kamil Pasha (1808-1876),\(^{40}\) was exceptionally popular and influential in the intellectual scene.\(^{41}\) Yusuf Kamil Pasha’s translation of Fenelon’s novel in the *İnsa* style – ornate poetic prose that was the dominant prose writing style in the Empire – was especially used in high school to teach prose composition.\(^{42}\)

The second translation, made in 1869, yet printed in 1880, by another distinguished figure in the political and cultural arena, Ahmed Vefik Pasha (1823-1891), was also popular and reprinted more than once.\(^{43}\) In contrast to the canonized ornate prose style of the previous translation, this version of *Télémaque* was characterized by its linguistic simplicity. The author was convinced that he had produced ‘a literal and accurate’ work in which ‘every word would produce pleasure’.\(^{44}\)

Although ancient philosophy, as we have seen above, was a major part of the Ottoman cultural world, Greek poetry and mythology had been largely neglected.

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\(^{38}\) This work is even considered to be the first translation from Western literature. Yet, according to Strauss, the first Ottoman-Turkish literary translations from Western literature appeared already in the 1830s in Egypt, in: Johann Strauss, ‘Turkish translations from Mehmed Ali’s Egypt: A pioneering Effort and its Results’, in: Saliha Paker (ed.) *Translations: (Re)shaping of Literature and Culture* (Istanbul 2002) 108-147.

\(^{39}\) Enginün, *Yeni Türk Edebiyatı Tanzimat’tan Cumhuriyet’e*, 177-179; Şemseddin Sami’s translation of Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* (often called the first modern English novel) in 1886 was also used in Ottoman schools; Johann Strauss, ‘Who Read What in the Ottoman Empire (19th-20th centuries)?’, 50.


\(^{41}\) Mardin, *The genesis of Young Ottoman Thought. A Study in the Modernization of Turkish Political Ideas* (Princeton 2000) 241-245. See also chapter 2 of this study.


\(^{44}\) Saliha Paker, ‘*Turkey*,’ 21-23.
Except for some transpositions and adoptions into popular legends, there was no explicit influence of Greco-Latin literature on Islamic or Turkish literature.\(^45\) Yusuf Kamil Pasha’s Terceme-i Telemak, however, engendered a lively interest into ancient Greek history and mythology and triggered translations of works on ancient history into Ottoman-Turkish.\(^46\)

Terceme-i Telemak shared this pioneering position with two other important works written in the same year (1859): Terceme-i Manzume (Translations of Verse), a selection of French poetry - La Fontaine, Lamartine, Gilbert and Racine – by the prominent intellectual İbrahim Şinasi, and the famous Muhaverat-i Hikemiye (Philosophical Dialogues) by Münif Paşa. These three works – strongly affected by French literature – were exceptionally important. As a matter of fact, these works introduced new literary genres and had a lasting influence on forms and ideas that shaped modern Turkish literature. But, most of all, the works were of great importance because they ‘marked the awakening of interest in European classics’.\(^47\)

Gradually, knowledge of Greek antiquity increased and classical authors became a point of reference in Ottoman literature. Within this framework, classical authors influenced and shaped the ideas of the intelligentsia of the late Ottoman Empire.\(^48\)

To sum up, Western humanist philosophy and Greek classical works were penetrating into Ottoman literature in the late Ottoman Empire. As Mehmet Can Doğan emphasizes, it might be true to say that the interest for humanist philosophy directed and stimulated the attention of the Ottoman intellectual towards the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*.\(^49\) Indeed, the literary developments and the new perceptions of the ancients created a climate in which classical poetry and

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\(^45\) Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar, *Yahya Kemal* (İstanbul 1962) 119.


mythology could enter Ottoman literature. Also in Ottoman painting and sculpture Greek mythology became an increasingly important source of inspiration.\(^{50}\)

3. Mythology and Homer: Ottoman Reticence

According to the antique tradition, the real originator of the Trojan War was the son of Priam, the king of the aforementioned city. When Paris was born, priests predicted that he would cause the downfall of his own country, whereupon Priam sent his own child to the mountains and left him with herdsmen. Paris grew up with the herdsmen in the mountains and became an excellent, brave man.

Zeus or Jupiter,\(^{51}\) who according to Greek mythology was the ruler of the cosmos and the father of gods, goddesses and men, hosted a banquet one day and invited all gods and goddesses, except Eris, the goddess of strife. While the guests were enjoying themselves Eris came to the window, threw an apple into their midst, saying “for the most beautiful goddess”. Because of this very apple of discord, which has been a saying ever since that time, the goddesses Hera, the wife and sister of Zeus, Aphrodite, the goddess of love and affection, and Athena, the goddess of wisdom and intelligence, started to quarrel.

In order to settle their dispute, Zeus gave the apple to his helper, the god named Hermes, and sent him with the three goddesses to Paris. Following the order he received, Hermes handed the apple to Paris; Athena promised Paris intelligence and wisdom, Hera property and treasure, Aphrodite offered the most beautiful woman in the world. Preferring and accepting Aphrodite’s offer, Paris handed the apple to her. Because of this, Hera and Athena appropriated the Greeks during the Trojan War, and Aphrodite the Trojans.

After a while Paris visited Menelaus, the king of Mycenae,\(^{52}\) and was treated with the utmost respect and veneration in his palace. Menelaus’ wife, named Helen, famous for

\(^{50}\) Yüksel, Türk Edebiyatında Yunan Antikitesi, 2-4; Budak, Batılaşma Sürecinde Çok Yönlü Bir Osmanlı Aydınlığı Münif Paşa, 289, 362-368, 397; see also: Okay, Osmanlı Devleti’nin yenileşme döneminde Türk edebiyatı’, 215-217; Ortaylı, İmparatorluğun en Uzun Yüzyılı, 244-254; Tanpınar, Edebiyat Dersleri (İstanbul 2004) 59.

\(^{51}\) The use of the Roman names of mythological figures was more common in the Ottoman Empire, probably because of a better match with the Ottoman language, but also because of their popularity in Europe. See: Yüksel, Türk Edebiyatında Yunan Antikitesi, 62.

\(^{52}\) The author confuses Sparta with Mycenae.
In his preface to the *Iliad* Fraşeri sums up the mythological characters and events that were decisive for the outbreak of the Trojan War. This mythological account is rather unique, since Greek mythology, with its main characters of pagan gods and goddesses, demigods and supernatural heroes played no particular role in the area of special interest of Ottoman intellectuals. As we have seen before, the Turks were not unfamiliar with epic narratives. One could even say that heroic epics are the oldest genre of Turkish literature. Greek and Roman mythology, however, apart from exceptions such as Katıb Çelebi’s *Tarih-i Frengi*, a seventeenth-century translation of the *Chronique de Jean Carrion* (Paris 1548),\(^{53}\) entered the Ottoman literature not before the second half of the nineteenth century.\(^{54}\) Its penetration, moreover, was mainly through European literature that was highly inspired by the art and culture of ancient Rome and Greek.

Indeed, the affection well-educated Europeans felt towards Greece was considerable. Due to intellectual modernizations and the emerging cultural nationalism, and as a part of the practice of creating a linear history of civilization of a superior European culture, the appreciation and appropriation of Homer was spread widely in the nineteenth century. Schliemann’s excavations at Hisarlık, his discoveries and subsequent archaeological research made the Homeric world tangible and intensified the appropriation of Homer all the more. Homer became a source of inspiration both morally and politically. The rise of atheism and the scientific study of the bible, moreover, created a climate in which both Homer and the bible were seen in a common historical perspective. Consequently, Greek classical literature was introduced in European school

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programmes and Homer became a fixed element in European education during the nineteenth century.\(^{55}\)

**Mythology, Islam and Eastern Literary Traditions**

The principal reason why – even in the enlightened late-nineteenth century – Ottoman intellectuals were circumspect about Homer’s pagan gods is closely connected to religion as well. Ottoman standards were clearly incompatible with polytheism and mythological events. In fact, the long-term absence of particular attention to Greek literature – contrary to antique philosophy – was essentially a result of the incongruity of mythology with Islam.\(^{56}\)

Although the existence of an interest in Homer and appreciation of Homeric literature at the end of the nineteenth century is obvious, Ottoman translations of Homer consisted of no more than a few attempts; Not one complete Turkish version of Homeric literature has been produced in the Ottoman Empire. As a result of the clash between mythology and Ottoman norms, Muslim intellectuals of the late Ottoman Empire were inexperienced with and hesitating to utilize mythology as a source.

From this point of view, the intellectual dilemma in the Ottoman-Muslim world that accompanied the conflict between mythology and the religious truth of the Islam is somewhat comparable to the clash of Homer’s polytheism and Christianity in the first centuries of the Christian era. Christian scholars tried to reconcile the pagan literature of Homer and the religious truth of the new faith for a long time and attempted to emulate Homer in their religion. As Manguel maintains ‘For Christianity, the reading of the ancient authors lent the new faith a prehistory and universality. For ancient world, it meant continuity and transmission of intellectual experience’.\(^{57}\)

The search of Şemseddin Sami for an Ottoman equivalent for the term mythology is symbolical for the way in which the Ottomans dealt with this conflict. Şemseddin Sami was one of the first intellectuals to discuss mythology


\(^{57}\) See for Homer and the Christian world: Manguel, *Homer’s the Iliad and the Odyssey*, 60-68, 67.
in his work named *Esatir* (1878). In his book Sami underlines that there is no equivalent for the term mythology in Eastern languages. Inspired by the term *esatirü’l-evvelin* (tales of men of ancient times) found in the verses of the Koran, he decides to use *esatir* as an equivalent. He emphasizes the significance of knowing mythology, namely to understand Greek and Roman works and to comprehend the science of Arabs.\(^{58}\) In reality, as Kreiser points out, *esatirü’l-evvelin* was used for a banned tradition that competed with the records of the prophet Mohammed.\(^{59}\)

Sami’s search for an acceptable term for mythology, his hesitance and circumspection in his explanations and his careful expressions reveal the discomfort with and the unconventionality of mythology in Ottoman intellectual life.\(^{60}\)

A result of the fact that narratives of pagan gods were unconventional was that Fraşeri could not rely on ample works of predecessors. In this context, Fraşeri emphasizes the neglect of Homer in the Islamic world. According to him, the Muslims had their own Homer and Virgil, namely Firdevsi and Nizami from Iran: ‘During the civilization of the Arabs, the Islamic community adopted some scientific writings from the Greeks, yet they did not favour Greek literature. This is why Islamic poets formed a separate caravan, in which the poets of Iran obtained a superior position’.\(^{61}\)

Indeed, there is a sharp distinction between western and Ottoman Muslim or eastern literary tradition. Tanpınar highlights the strong dissimilarity by comparing the two major epics of both worlds: the *Iliad* and Firdevsi’s *Şehname*. He states that the composition of the *Şehname* is comparable to the wall reliefs of the Palace of Sargon II and Trajan’s column, while the *Iliad* is comparable to

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\(^{60}\) Along with Şemseddin Sami and Ahmed Midhat Efendi, more and more Ottoman intellectuals of the era started to defend the importance of mythology. Literary works with mythological topics became increasingly noticeable; see Kreiser, ‘Troia und die Homerischen Epen. Von Mehmet II. bis İsmet İnönü’, 286 and Yüksel, *Türk Edebiyatında Yunan Antikitesi*, 103-112.

classical Greek sculptures. According to Tanpinar ‘in the Iliad, the whole Greek world, including the cosmos, the gods, the lives, the works and arts of the Greeks and Greek civilization are gathered in the narrative of one event. The story of the Iliad is an entity; details are disregarded or ingeniously integrated in the whole. The Şehname, on the other hand, is a rectilinear narrative that treats every detail with the same precision’. Finally, he concludes that on the whole eastern narrative is chiefly a rectilinear narration. This difference between the Western and Eastern traditions of composition must have been an impediment for the introduction of Homeric epics in Ottoman literature as well.

On the other hand, the mode of Homeric appreciation in modern Europe differed in both the national and the cultural sphere as well. As historian Pim den Boer states, ‘political groups and cultural affinities in national traditions’ were at the basis of differences in appreciation. In this respect, he notes that while Plato was desirable for the German ‘Bildungsbürger’ and the British utilitarians, the social Darwinists and late Victorian Edwardians nourished Homeric ideals. In France, on the other hand, Homer was never a core source of identification. Belonging to the past aristocratic society, Homer was not adored as much in France as in Britain or Germany. Although the Greek language was introduced in French classical education, it did not receive the same status as in Germany or Britain. In view of the dominant position of the French education system, culture and literature in the Ottoman Empire, the Ottomans most probably followed the French tradition of Homeric appreciation in which an intense identification with Homeric heroes was absent.

Another complexity is related to the Aruz metric system of the traditional Ottoman Divan poetry that did not suit the structure of western poetry. In fact, Ottoman authors faced serious linguistic struggles when translating verse into Aruz or syllabic verse. Hence, both attempts at translating the Iliad in the

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62 Tanpinar, XIX. Asır Türk Edebiyatı Tarihi, 41.
63 Den Boer, ‘Homer in Modern Europe’, 179.
64 Aruz is the primary prosodic metre used in Divan literature.
65 The question of the difficulties of translating verse into Aruz was a much-discussed topic.
Ottoman era were in prose. Hilmi legitimates his translation in prose by saying: ‘A translation in verse would corrupt the poetical quality of the story’.

For all the linguistic and literary struggles and handicaps, the reservations towards mythology seem to be the major reason for the delayed attempts at translating Homeric poems. Hence, although Selanikli Hilmi made his translation of the first book of Homer’s *Iliad* almost ten years later, he was even more circumspect with mythological figures and events. In fact, Selanikli Hilmi avoids mythology completely in the introduction to his translation. His text, moreover, shows his worries about possible criticism to his work. Indeed, he emphasizes the great value of Homer and the *Iliad*. Yet, on the other hand, he clearly does not feel confident about the reception of his work. However, as Kreiser points out, we have to bear in mind that this work was published shortly after the Greco-Ottoman War of 1897. Perhaps his hesitation had to do with this fact as well.

Although both very ambitious and enthusiastic at the start, neither Fraşeri nor Selanikli Hilmi finished their work. Both walked on untried ground. They pioneered and undoubtedly experienced the complexities involved. While Fraşeri chose to fill the gap and introduced, discussed and explained in detail the pagan gods, their actions and characteristics and their role in Homeric literature, Hilmi decided to ignore or veil mythological figures and events.

His translation, moreover, includes a lot of imperfect information. Besides ignoring the role of Aphrodite and many other gods and goddesses, he confuses the names of Homeric heroes several times. Furthermore, he locates Troy in the Province of Izmir and states incorrectly that Paris was the heir of Priam and that


67 Hilmi, dal, yd, ye. 
68 For a recent study in the Greco-Ottoman War of 1897, see Mehmet Uğur Ekinci, *The Origins of the 1897 Ottoman-Greek War: A Diplomatic History* (Ankara 2006). 
70 Fraşeri completed an Albanian version of the *Iliad* in 1896: *Iliadh’e Omirit* (Bucharest 1896).
he stayed at Agamemnon’s palace instead of at Menelaus’s.

Besides an uncomfortable relationship with mythology, it was perhaps also his awareness of his shortcomings that triggered him to use an apologetic tone in his preface: ‘I, a humble translator, had a strong desire to translate this story (…). Hey, it is not a shame!’.  

4. Homer and Troy in Ottoman Essays, Books, Theatre Plays & the First Translations (1884-1908)

The highly valued poet (...) expressed his people’s sincerity and etiquette, customs and morality, all conditions and behaviours of men and women, of the rich and the poor. Taking an impartial look at Homer, we can say that Homer is a poet, a prose writer, a chronicler, a philosopher, a geographer (...), a satirist (...).

Kevkебü’l Ulum, 1, 16/R/1302 (3rd January 1885), translated from Ottoman.

With its heroic expressions of ten years of siege and dispute, and the full explanation of situations connected with them, the Iliad is a most sublime and excellent product of poetical imagination, well-arranged and decorated. The Iliad is a reflection of a manifest patriotism and defence of honesty.

Na’im Fraşeri, Ilyada. Eser-i Homer (Istanbul 1303/1885-1886) preface, 1-6, translated from Ottoman.

Na’im Fraşeri (1846-1900) belonged to an Albanian Muslim landowning family from Frasher in southern Albania. Like other children of well-to-do Muslim

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71 Hilmi, Ilyas yahud şair-i şehir Omiros, yd, ye.
72 Na’im Fraşeri and his brothers Şemseddin Sami (1850-1904) and Abdil Fraşeri (1839-92) were all Ottoman bureaucrats and members of the intellectual scene of the period. The Albanian Muslim community of the Janina region felt a strong commitment to the cultural multifaceted Ottoman Empire, and, at the same time, they had a patriotic devotion to the land of Albania. Istanbul was the influential metropolitan cultural centre for Albanian leaders in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. The dual loyalty of the Albanians was not exceptional ‘in the multinational Ottoman Empire with its multiple layers of self-consciousness, identity and loyalty’, until the turn of the century. The nationalist policies of the Young Turks from 1909
families of the region, Fraşeri went to the famous Greek Gymnasium, Zossimea, in Ioannina, which is nowadays within the borders of Greece. There he learnt ancient and modern Greek, French and Italian. At home he spoke Albanian and Turkish and in addition he learnt Arabic and Persian through private lessons. After his study he moved to Istanbul and became a prominent Ottoman bureaucrat. He served as a member and chairman of the Committee of Inspection and Examination (Encümeni Teftiş ve Muayene) affiliated to the Ministry of Public Instruction. The Committee was responsible for checking and censoring books and magazines before printing. He died and was buried in Istanbul in 1900.74

In the fifteen-page preface to his prose translation, all together a booklet of 43 pages, Na’im Fraşeri emphasizes his pioneer position. He tells his readers that he is the first to translate the Iliad by saying that unfortunately there has been no Ottoman Turkish translation of the Iliad and the Odyssey so far.75 However, the former Minister of Education and leading figure of the humanist politics of the 1930s and the 1940s in Turkey, Hasan Ali Yücel,76 maintains that it is the Ottoman diplomat Sadullah Paşa (1839-1890) who actually deserves to be called the first translator of the Iliad into Turkish. Sadullah Paşa’s translation contained

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73 A selection of other publications of Na’im Frasheri: Kavaidi Farisiyye ber tarzi nevin (Grammar of the Persian language according to the new method) (Istanbul 1871), İhtiraat ve kesfiyyat (Inventions and Discoveries) (Istanbul 1881), Tahayyülât (Dreams) (Istanbul 1884), O eros (Love) (Istanbul 1895) and İstori e Shqipërisë (History of Albania) (Sofia 1899). See for Na’im Fraşeri’s Turkish and Persian publications: Hasan Kaleshi, ‘Veprat turqisht de persisht te Naim Frashere’, Gjurmime Albanologjike, 1970, 143-153.

74 See for biographical information on Na’im Fraşeri: Bursalı Mehmed Tahir, Osmanlı Müellifleri, 2, (Istanbul 1333) 469. Bursalı Mehmed Tahir argues, however, that Naim Fraséri had died in 1896. See also: Agah Sırrı Levend, Şemsettin Sami (Ankara 169) 46; Türk Ansiklopedisi, 17, (Ankara 1969) 27 and Yüksel, Türk Edebiyatında Yunan Antikitesi, 229-231.

75 Fraşeri, Ilyada, Eser-i Homer, 13.

ten couplets of two rhyming verses and a part in prose. Yücel incorporated the
ten couplets in his work *Edebiyat Tarihimizden* (From the History of Our
Literature).

However, Sadullah Paşa’s translation had not been published,
which makes a final statement on this subject impossible. Therefore, as Klaus
Kreiser rightly suggests, Na’im Fraşeri’s printed work has to be regarded as the
first translation of Homer’s *Iliad.*

As a matter of fact, an essay published on the 2nd of February 1885 confirms
Kreiser’s conclusion. The anonymous author states that hopefully soon the *Iliad*
and the Odyssey ‘will be translated into Turkish, so that we will not have to go
without Homer’s work any longer’. Actually, up to the publication of the first
translation of the *Iliad,* Ottoman-Turkish readers had the opportunity to broaden
their knowledge of Homer through essays in periodicals. Between December
1884 and March 1885, for instance, three extensive articles including a
biography of Homer, an introduction to his poems and a summary of the books
of the *Iliad* appeared in the periodical *Kevkebü’l Ulum* (fig. 3).

Almost a decade earlier a theatre play inspired by the *Odyssey* was produced by
Ali Haydar (1836-1914). The verse comedy, *Rüya Oyunu,* published in
1876/1877, was about a dream of ‘Bey’ (Lord) on the nymph Calypso. ‘Bey’
believed himself to be in love with Calypso. The nymph, on the other hand,
deeply in love with Odysseus, was waiting for his return. She told ‘Bey’ that
Odysseus had sailed away with Mentes and Telemachus. Although she could
have stopped Odysseus, her love refrained her from doing so. At the end of the
play, ‘Bey’ woke up and wrote down the contents of his dream to be sent to an
interpreter.

Gradually Homer became an important point of reference in Ottoman literature.
Ahmed Midhat Efendi, for instance, discusses Homer and his epics in his

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79 *Kevkebü’l Ulum,* 01/Ra/1302 (19th December 1884) 59-65; 16/Ra/1302 (3rd January 1885) 93-
97 and 16/R/1302 (2nd February 1885) 159-161.
Edebiyatında Yunan Antikitesi,* 205.
analysis of the birth of the novel in his work *Ahbar-i Asara Tamim-i Enzar* (Literary Works: an Overview) (1890).\(^{81}\) Evaluating Herodotus’ historiography, he underscores the transformation of ideas in ancient Greece between the period of Homer and Herodotus and makes an interesting connection between the ancient Greek literary developments and contemporary Ottoman literary issues.

According to Ahmed Midhat Efendi, in the six hundred years between Homer and Herodotus ‘the ideas and perspectives of the Greeks’ gradually changed, and in the end ‘gods and goddesses, half heavenly and half earthly heroes’ went ‘out of fashion’. The followers of Homer and Hesiod, moreover, had become merely imitators, as they were never able to reach the level of their masters. Herodotus, on the other hand, was a representative of new ideas and perspectives, according to the author.\(^{82}\)

In his essay ‘Mitoloji ve Şiir’ (Mythology and Poetry), published in 1890 in *Tercüman-ı Hakikat*, Ahmet Midhat Efendi again deals with mythology and the role of Homer in it. He maintains that mythological figures were actually real characters, but gradually became fictional through the agency of Homer and his followers.\(^{83}\)

In 1881, in the introductory remarks to one of his theatre plays, Namik Kemal (1840-1888), the leading figure of the New Ottoman Literature who also lived in Gallipoli (Dardanelles) during a period of exile in 1872, emphasized the strong influence of Homeric poems on Greek tragedy and the sculptors of the great Phedias as well.\(^{84}\)

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\(^ {84}\) Kreiser, ‘Troia und die Homerischen Epen. Von Mehmet II. bis İsmet İnönü’, 284; the introductory remarks can be found in Namik Kemal’s *Mukaddeme-i Celal* (İstanbul 1888); See
Homer and the *Iliad* also received appropriate attention in a treatise on Troy that appeared in the third volume of the encyclopaedia *Kamus ül-Alâm* (Dictionary of Universal History and Geography) (1891), written by Na‘im Fraşeri’s brother Şemseddin Sami Fraşeri (1850-1904). This massive six-volume encyclopaedia, published between 1889 and 1899, dealing with important Ottoman and Islamic subjects, figures and countries and, at the same time, with Western history and geography, is a work of an exceptional calibre. According to the author in his introduction, an up-to-date encyclopaedia on world history and geography was much needed in the Empire, since these sciences were of great importance for the development of civilizations. He refused to merely translate a western encyclopaedia into Ottoman-Turkish: western encyclopaedias chiefly concentrated on European issues and were therefore incomplete. *Kamus ül-Alâm* brought western and eastern history and geography together.

The essay dealing with Troy outlined the contemporary knowledge of Troy in the Ottoman Empire (fig 4). A history of Troy, a chronological list of Trojan rulers, the Trojan War, and the archaeological developments in the region were part of the article. Special attention was given to the location of the site on Ottoman soil through underlying both Greek and Ottoman designations: ‘Truva or Troya, situated in the northwestern part of Asia Minor, nowadays within the Province of Biga’, ‘at the western foot of Mount Ida (that is to say Kaz) and along the river Xanti’ (that is to say Menderes).
A second translation of the first song of the Iliad into Ottoman-Turkish from the Greek, written by Selankli Hilmi, appeared in 1898 or 1899: Ilyas yahud şair-i şehir Omiros (the Iliad or the celebrated poet Homer). Little is known about the author; yet, according to the text on the title page, the translator was a member of the Committee of Inspection and Examination (Encümeni Teftiş ve Muayene), and consequently like Na'im Fraşeri an Ottoman bureaucrat as well. Hilmi’s translation of 61 pages includes an introduction of 15 pages and the first book of the Iliad in two chapters: the first chapter (26 pages) is called ‘Wrath! Violence!’ and the second chapter (20 pages) is called ‘Departure!’ Compared to Fraşeri’s translation Hilmi’s work is unadorned, bare and almost completely stripped of the original adjectives describing the Homeric figures. Consequently, Hilmi’s own interpretation has the upper hand. Fraşeri, conversely, was more successful in passing on the original story.

In spite of the imperfections of Hilmi’s translation, the work had a great effect on significant literary figures. The leading intellectual of the time, Yahya Kemal Beyatlı, who, together with his contemporary Yakub Kadri Karaoğlu, initiated the neo-Hellenist movement in the early twentieth century, expressed his high appreciation of Selankli Hilmi’s translation by saying that he had been ‘tremendously touched’ by this work. He first assumed that ‘a Greek had produced the translation’, but ‘after a long time’, he utters, ‘I understood that

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88 Şemseddin Sami, Kamus-ül Alâm, 1647.
89 Selankli Hilmi, Ilyas yahud şair-i şehir Omiros (İstanbul 1316/1898-1899).
90 Selankli Hilmi, Ilyas yahud şair-i şehir Omiros, 1, 27.
91 Text analysis is not primarily a part of this survey. The main focus of this research is to trace, select and interpret significant information concerning the reception of Homer in, for instance, literary texts.
92 Criticism, among other things, on the title Ilias, veiled mythological figures, ignoring or mixing up chief characters, such as Agamemnon and Menelaus, or incorrect topographic information such as situating Troy in the Province of Izmir instead of Biga, for example. See Ismail Habip Sevük, Avrupa Edebiyatı ve Biz. Garpten Tercümler, 1, (İstanbul 1940) 65 and Yüksel, Türk Edebiyatında Yunan Antikitesi, 55-72.
93 For the neo-Hellenist movement in the Ottoman Empire, see: Beşir Ayvazoğlu, Yahya Kemal, Eve Dönen Adam (İstanbul 2008); Yakub Kadri Karaoğlanoğlu, Gençlik ve Edebiyat Hattalari (Ankara 1969); Mehmed Tevfik, Esâîr-i Yunâniyan (Kostantiniye 1329); Beşir Ayvazoğlu, ‘Neo-Hellenism in Turkey’, in: Kelder, Uslu, Şerifoğlu (eds.), Troy. City, Homer and Turkey, 150-155.
what I had been reading at that time was an incomplete Turkish translation of Homer’s Iliad’.  

5. Admiration for the ‘Lord of Poets’

The aforementioned writer [Homer] and the great works the Iliad and the Odyssey are most excessively recited by respectful learned literary figures. This is why Homer is correctly remembered by his nickname the Lord of Poets.

Kevkeb”ül Ulum, 01/Ra/1302 (19th December 1884), translated from Ottoman.

The Ottoman intellectuals evidently recognized the importance of Homer and, above all, they were aware of the extraordinary position of the Iliad and the Odyssey in the history of literature. With this in mind,Fraşeri, in his preface to his translation, emphasizes Homer’s exceptional influence on following literary figures of various backgrounds. He informs his Ottoman Turkish readers that the works of Homer were a ‘breeding ground’ not only for ancient Greeks, but also for Romans and subsequent European writers and poets as well. ‘Famous poets such as Hesiod, Aeschylus, Euripides, Sophocles and the writer of comedies Aristophanes’ he continues, ‘were all guided by Homer and tragedians in particular quoted the Iliad and the Odyssey intensively’. With respect to the Romans, he states that they ‘followed the Greeks in all fields, and therefore in literature as well’: ‘Virgil deserves to be called the Homer of the Romans. His work the Aeneid is like a continuation of the Iliad and the Odyssey’. Subsequently, he draws attention to literary figures such as ‘Horace, Tasso, Dante, Milton and the rest of old and new European poets forming a caravan by following the preceding.’ And according to Fraşeri, ‘the leader of the caravan is Homer’. 

Selanikli Hilmi’s account of Homeric reception is even more sumptuous. He

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94 Yahya Kemal Beyatlı, Çocukluğu, Gençliğim, Siyasî ve Edebi Hatıralarım (İstanbul 1999) 100; Yüksel, Türk Edebiyatında Yunan Antikitesi, 55.
95 Fraşeri, Ilyada. Eser-i Homer, 10-14.
pays a glowing tribute to Homer as a poet ‘who nourished the creation of art’ and praises the *Iliad* as a source of inspiration ‘for poets with the most venerable minds’. To emphasize the respect of esteemed literary figures for the *Iliad*, he quotes Shakespeare and Rousseau but he also pays attention to the vast Homeric appreciation of ancient philosophers, such as Aristotle.  

Both Fraşeri as well as Selanikli Hilmi explicitly draw attention to the high regard of Alexander the Great for Homer. The Alexander or Iskender Legends are well-known in the Muslim World, and, moreover, Alexander the Great had an exceptional position in Ottoman culture as well. Sultan Mehmed II’s identification with Alexander is illustrative for this point. Presumably as a result of the Ottoman appropriation of Alexander, Fraşeri underlines explicitly that Alexander the Great was not a Greek, ‘but a foreigner’ to the Greeks.

To emphasize Alexander’s deep admiration for the *Iliad*, Hilmi refers to Plutarch’s ‘Parallel Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans’ and draws attention to the narrative of Alexander’s encounter with the Persian king Darius III. After defeating the Persians, Hilmi says, ‘Alexander was presented a valuable desk of Darius as a present of the victory, to which, to mark his esteem, he uttered “I am even more happy with this present than the victory, since I very

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96 Hilmi, Ilyas yahud şair-i şehir Omiros, cin.
98 The *Iskendername* (The Book of Alexander) is one of the earliest surviving examples of an illustrated Ottoman manuscript. It was written by the poet Ahmedi in the fourteenth century and tells about the heroic deeds and conquests of Alexander the Great. The epical poem plays an exceptional role in Turkish culture. It also deals with geographical, theological, philosophical and historical matters and is considered to be an early source for Ottoman history; see Ismail Unver, *Ahmedi-Iskendername* (Ankara 1983); Caroline Goodwin Sawyer, *Alexander, history, and piety: A study of Ahmedi’s 14th-century Ottoman ‘Iskendernâme’*, (Colombia University 1997) and Yaşar Akdoğan, *Iskendername’den Seçmeler* (Ankara 1988).
much needed such a precious attribute to store the book of the Iliad of the beloved poet Homer’’.

After discussing Alexander’s devotion for Homer at length, both translators pay due attention to *The Adventures of Telemachus*. In view of the popularity of the story among the Ottoman-Turks, however, this is not surprising. Fraşeri points out that ‘Fenelon’s book the Adventures of Telemachus is an addendum to the Odyssey’. Selanikli Hilmi praises Homer and suggests that his Ottoman-Turkish readers compare ‘the celebrated story “Telemachus” of Fenelon with the Iliad’. According to Hilmi ‘the comparison of these two works will give one the opportunity to appoint the difference between fantasy and reality’, since Telemachus is ‘regarded as poetical imagination’ and Homer ‘describes an event by giving ethics, customs and beliefs a central position’.

The relation between the *Odyssey* and *The Adventures of Telemachus* was also strongly emphasized in the periodical *Kevkeb’ül Ulum*. Assuming that Ottoman-Turks were acquainted with Telemachus, readers were informed that many of the episodes of Telemachus had their origins in ‘the Odyssey, the story of Ulysses’ return journey to his home island’.

Not only the two major Homeric works were at the centre of attention, other poems attributed to Homer were a topic for discussion as well: ‘According to Aristotle Homer wrote other poems as well. As a matter of fact, one of them was called Margites’. Fraşeri, however, believed that Homer was much too brilliant to be the author of other poems, such as *The Battle of Frogs and Mice*. ‘It is clear that’, he states, ‘Homer who was used to invent and arrange important events, would never deign to write about such inferior matters. Therefore, there is no question about it that the aforementioned work is no more than an imitation’.

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According to Fraşeri, ‘until now no other poet in the world had reached the level of Homer. He will always be the father of the poetry and the leader of the poets and the Iliad and the Odyssey will always be distinguished among the rest of the verses’. And what’s more, according to Kevkeb’ül Ulum: ‘No poet has ever been able to match him’.

Preference for the Iliad

*Troy was situated near Çanakkale. Although in the past Troy and both its siege and the war were considered to exist only in the imagination, the excavations in the surroundings have confirmed and strengthened the contents of the Iliad.*


*The city of Troy or Ilion, with strong and solid city walls, strengthened with many citadels on the Asian shore [must be in the direction of the province of Izmir. Although history has not yet settled this issue, the natural requirements of the region have confirmed our idea].*


The first Ottoman translation activities of Homeric literature concentrated on the *Iliad*. The excavations in Troy and the public attention for these activities must have strengthened this preference. Hence, both Fraşeri and Hilmi draw attention to the geographical location of Troy. Fraşeri, moreover, gives brief information on the results of the archaeological research at the site. As a matter of fact, from the 1890s onwards, newspapers and periodicals paid increasing attention to the archaeological activities at Troy that ‘had become famous thanks to Homer’s
As is noticeable in articles published, for instance, in *Ikdam* and *Servet-i Fünun*, the Ottoman reading public had been informed about the history of the excavations at Troy, yet also about issues such as the dispute between scholars about the correct site (Ballıdağ or Hisarlık), the prominent role of Frank Calvert and the most current archaeological research and results of the time. Besides these informative texts, the press also reported on visitors at the site and their origins. This shows a close involvement with the actual site of Troy, which will be further discussed in the next chapter.

Besides a deep admiration for Homer and a preference for the *Iliad*, biographical notes on Homer were also incorporated in literary texts. In this respect, a distinct connection was made between the famous poet and the city of Izmir within the territories of the Empire.

### 6. Izmir (Smyrna): Homer’s hometown

Like many famous figures of antiquity, Homer, too, was an illegitimate child. Because Cretheis the daughter of Melanopus gave birth to him on the banks of the river Meles in the vicinity of Izmir, she named him Melesigenes, which means child of the river Meles.

*Kevkeb’ül Ulum, 01/Ra/1302 (19th December 1884), translated from Ottoman.*

Although his nationality, his time and his life story are veiled in mystery and ambiguity, there is a strong possibility that he was born ten centuries before Christ and two centuries after the Trojan war. His birthplace is the city of Izmir, his mother’s name is Cretheis and his father is unknown. He got his nickname Son of Meles because he was born on the banks of the river Meles, which at that time ran near Izmir.

*Na’im Fraşeri, Ilyada. Eser-i Homer (Istanbul 1303/1885-1886) preface, 7-9, translated from Ottoman.*

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108 *Ikdam*, 19/S/1310 (8th March 1893); *Ikdam*, 3 Kanun-i-evvel 1313 (15th December 1897); *Servet-i Fünun*, 26, 25 Mart 1320 (7th April 1904).
It is generally known that the location of Homer’s birthplace is much disputed. Seven cities claim to be his place of birth: Smyrna, Chios, Colophon, Salamis, Rhodes, Argos and Athens. The outcomes of nineteenth-century archaeological research, however, strengthened the possibility of Smyrna as Homer’s birthplace. The biographical information in *Kevkeb’ül Ulum* and Frašeri’s preface both explicitly emphasize this possibility by referring to the legend that Homer’s name was Melesigenes. In fact, they seemed quite convinced that ‘their’ eminent city of Izmir is the place where Homer came into the world. In all probability, the writers based their knowledge on various Homeric biographies, in particular on the *Life of Homer* by Pseudo-Herodotus, which declares Smyrna to be the birthplace of Homer and places Homer’s birth date as 168 years after the Trojan War.

The biography of Homer given in the essay in the *Kevkeb’ül Ulum* is quite detailed and pays comprehensive attention to geographical aspects (fig. 4). On the other hand, it is generally known that Ottoman intellectuals knew antique Greek geography very well. In their translations of ancient works and other literary productions, they usually marked the antique places within the Ottoman Empire.

The author of the essay in the *Kevkeb’ül Ulum* tells his readers about Homer’s childhood, his teacher’s prediction of a bright future, Mentes’ (chief of the Taphians in the *Odyssey*) invitation to travel along with him on the sea, his long journeys and visits of various places (locations in the *Odyssey*), how he did research during his journey and composed poems based on his observations, how he went blind in Colophon, Mentor’s care for him and how he got the name Homer in Cyme. On this point the author states that the blind Melesigenes went to Cyme to work as a bard and after a while he was renowned in the city. The

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109 In this respect, the important Homeric scholar Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff declared ‘thus there can be no doubt of the existence of the poet Homaros or Homeros of Smyrna’ in: *Die Ilias un Homer* (Berlin 1916), 372. See also Latacz, *Homer. His Art and His World*, 25-27.

110 In this biography of Homer many episodes and figures of the *Odyssey* are incorporated in Homer’s life, see: Manguel, *Homer’s the Iliad and the Odyssey*, 29-32 and also Hérodote, *Vie d’Homère*, mise en français d’Amyot, par J. J. van Dooren (Paris 1926). For the various Homer Vitae see also: Latacz, *Homer. His Art and His World*, 23-30.

The senate was advised to take care of the blind poet, because he could bring great fame to the city with his songs. Yet one of the administrators objected and according to the article he said: ‘If we are going to give every blind we met a salary, soon we will carry a convoy of blinds on our shoulders’. ‘From then on’, the author resumes, ‘the name Melesigenes disappeared and Homer, which means blind, replaced it. Subsequently, the blind poet cursed Cyme and left for Phocaea. There, too, he was dogged by misfortune’.

The article then goes on to discuss Homer’s struggle with Thestorides, who recorded Homer’s poems in exchange for bed and board and left for Chios. He made people believe that the poems were his own and became famous on the island. Homer followed the ‘thief’ to Chios, but Thestorides ‘ran off’. About the last years of Homer the author of the article in Kevkeb’ül Ulum remarks that Homer had a pleasant life in Chios and that eventually he was much beloved everywhere in Greece. Finally Homer fell ill during a journey from Samos to Athens near Ios, where he stayed a while and finally died.\(^{112}\)

After an introduction about Homer’s mother, his education and the composition of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, Fraşeri concentrates on the ‘Homeric question’ in particular. He reviews the flourishing debates of contemporary scholars concerning the identity of Homer, which of the epics might have been composed by Homer, and the historicity of the *Iliad*. Questions that occupied the minds of Homeric scholars in the nineteenth century were: Who was this influential poet Homer? Where did he come from? Was he alone? How many poets where involved in creating the poems? Was the *Iliad* based on a historical conflict, or was it only a product of human imagination?\(^{113}\)

Taking all views into consideration, Fraşeri concludes that Homer must have been a real person, a single poet who wrote the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* by himself. He emphasizes that although ‘the life story and the conditions of the poet of the

\(^{112}\) *Kevkeb’ül Ulum*, 01/Ra/1302 (19th December 1884).

Iliad and the Odyssey may be veiled, his existence could never be denied’.

Fraşeri concludes in his introduction that ‘it is not the name of Homer that gave the abovementioned famous works their reputation and fame; quite the reverse, the works made the author famous. Therefore, Homer is the Iliad and the Odyssey’. ¹¹⁴

¹¹⁴ Fraşeri, Ilyada. Eser-i Homer, 10.
Figure 1
Selanikli Hilmi, *Ilyas yahud şair-i şehir Omiros (The Iliad or the celebrated poet Homer)*, Istanbul 1898 or 1899. Hilmi made the second Ottoman Turkish translation of the first book of the *Iliad*. Little is known about the translator, but according to the frontispiece he was a civil servant at the Ministry of Public Instruction. Hilmi’s translation runs to 61 pages and includes an introduction of 15 pages and the First Book of the *Iliad* in two chapters (photo Gûnay Uslu, 2010).
Before the publication of the first translation of the *Iliad*, Ottoman Turkish readers were able to extend their knowledge of Homer through periodicals. Three extensive articles appeared for example between December 1884 and March 1885 in the magazine *Kevkebûl Ulum*, including a biography of Homer, an introduction to his works and a summary of the *Iliad*. *Kevkebûl Ulum*, 3 January 1885, page 93 (Photo Günay Uslu, 2012).
Figure 4
Homer and the *Iliad* were accorded their appropriate place in the third part of *Kamus ül-Alam* (1891). This encyclopaedia in six substantial parts, published between 1889 and 1899, is an exceptional work on significant Ottoman and Islamic themes, personalities and countries, and, in addition, on Western history and geography. The essay on Troy provides a summary of contemporary knowledge of Troy in the Ottoman Empire: a history of Troy, a chronological list of rulers, the Trojan War and archaeological developments in the region. Special attention is paid to the location of Troy on Ottoman soil. (Photo Günay Uslu, 2011)