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Uslu, G.

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# Homer, Troy and the Turks

Heritage & Identity in the Late Ottoman Empire 1870-1915

## Summary

Homer and Troy, the first *lieux de mémoire* for ancient Greek civilization and a fundamental part of the collective identity of European nations, inspired also Ottoman-Turkish imagination and cultural traditions. There has been a great deal of valuable historical research into Homer, the archaeology of Troy and in particular into Heinrich Schliemann and his archaeological activities in the Ottoman Empire in the late nineteenth century. Most research, however, relies on Western sources. Hardly any attention has been paid to the archaeological concerns and interests of the Ottomans themselves. This study relies for a large part on Ottoman sources and explores the Ottoman-Turkish involvement and interest in Homer and Troy between 1870, when Schliemann started his first excavations on Ottoman soil, and 1915 (the Battle of Gallipoli), when Troy became a component of the heroic story of the Turkish nation.

This thesis brings together the Ottoman and European experiences and traditions regarding Homer and Troy. It includes the Ottoman perspective and position with regard to the history of the archaeology of Troy and highlights the interactions between the Ottomans and west-European archaeologists, politicians and diplomats and the cultural and political frameworks in which they operated. Detailed examination of Ottoman documents and literature related to Homer and Troy, between 1870 and 1915, demonstrates that the Ottomans were much more interested in Homeric heritage than previously acknowledged.

Chapter 1 explores the discovery of Troy on Ottoman soil. Fascinated by Homer and in search of the historicity of the *Iliad*, Heinrich Schliemann (1822-1890) excavated at Hisarlık, on the Asian shore of the Dardanelles, in the second half of the nineteenth century. His first campaign of excavations (1871-1874) resulted in his claim of the discovery of Homeric Troy and the finding of what has been termed 'Priam's Treasure', which he illegally removed from the Empire. Schliemann's archaeological activities and his Trojan discoveries received global

acclaim and impressed nineteenth-century Europe. He became world-famous as the excavator of Troy.

The illegal transportations of the principal treasuries of Troy created a feeling of great loss on Ottoman side. Ottoman authorities felt deceived and public opinion was one of high indignation. Although faced with massive, both internal and external political, social, and economic problems in the 1870s, the Ottomans strove not to lose their grip on the excavations of Schliemann. The authorities refused to give Schliemann free play and put Troy under strict vigilance. By tightening the excavation conditions and demanding priority rights on Trojan artefacts, they tried to strengthen their position and make their mark.

Chapter 2 shifts to the Ottoman perspective on the developments in Troy and deals with the intellectual climate of the late Ottoman Empire. The nineteenth century, or the so-called 'longest century of the Empire', was for the Ottomans a turbulent and enervating era in which major transformations took place and the foundations were laid for important future developments and institutions. Once one of the superior powers in the world, controlling a large part of south-eastern Europe, North Africa and Western Asia, the Ottoman Empire had fallen into a situation in which it had to deal with serious internal nationalist breakaway movements and European imperial aspirations of controlling their territories. Leading figures of the Ottoman society tried to save the Empire by far-reaching modernizations. During the *Tanzimat* (reorganization) era (1839-1876) the government explicitly accepted the basic principles of the Enlightenment and made modernization a state programme. During this process the connection between ancient Greece, studying classical literature and modern civilization became prominent. Ottoman Muslim subjects were increasingly interested in the intellectual heritage of the classical antiquity. The Ottomans understood that the classics formed one of the foundations of modern civilization. Claiming antiquities would not only be an instrument in constructing a modern imperial identity, it would also be a ticket to the inclusion in the universal history of civilization.

The discomfort about acquisitions of antiquities from Ottoman soil, the fact that

these objects were included in various museums in Europe and, moreover, the fact that Europe had built its idea of progress on civilizations on Ottoman territory were major issues for the Ottoman political and cultural elite in the late nineteenth century. The antiquities regulations of 1869 and 1874 demonstrate a modern attitude towards the organisation and protection of artefacts and archaeological sites in the Empire.

The appointment of Osman Hamdi Bey (1842 – 1910) as director of the Imperial Museum in 1881, marked the shift in the way Ottomans looked at the tangible and intangible heritage of the Empire. From the 1880s onward, the Ottoman-Turks participated increasingly in archaeological excavations and the Imperial Museum in Istanbul developed from a small collection into an institution with empire-wide ambitions.

Chapter 3 discusses the Ottoman involvement in the archaeology of Troy during the early 1880s and the repeating clashes between Schliemann and the Ottoman authorities. Schliemann profited of the strengthened relationship of the Ottomans with the German Empire. The intervention of various leading figures, such as the powerful German chancellor Otto von Bismarck (1815-1898), enabled Schliemann to obtain permits. However, Ottoman authorities did not really tolerate Schliemann's undertakings on their soil. They had decided to take a clear protective position on Troy. Schliemann's Ottoman supervisors and local authorities kept a close eye on his new excavations. Schliemann saw the Ottoman efforts to safeguard the Trojan artefacts merely as irritating obstacles, instead of a clear expression of the Ottoman drive to appropriate them as their own heritage, and an important component of their cultural policy of modern imperial Ottoman identity in the universal history of civilization.

Ottoman efforts to protect antiquities increased rapidly in the years after the promulgation of the revised antiquities code in 1884, which forbade archaeologists to take original ancient objects out of the Empire. Not only had it become difficult to obtain permissions to excavate on Ottoman soil, visiting archaeological sites was restrained as well. Foreigners needed a formal permission from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to visit historic sites and

monuments. The strictness of the antiquities bylaw of 1884 had a deterring effect and put many European archaeologists off, including Schliemann.

Chapter 4 deals with the interest in Homer, Homeric epics and Troy in Ottoman-Turkish literature. The discovery of Troy and the subsequent archaeological research stimulated Ottoman interest in Homer and Troy considerably. Homeric heritage had now become tangible through its localization and its artefacts. This resulted in various attempts to translate the *Iliad* into Ottoman-Turkish, biographical notes on Homer, informative articles in periodicals and newspapers on Homeric literature and the topographical characteristics of Homeric locations on Ottoman soil.

The final chapter describes the excavations in Troy between 1885 and 1915 and the changing Ottoman attitudes towards Troy and Homer during the Great War with the Battle of Gallipoli as the culminating point.

Schliemann died in 1890 and Wilhelm Dörpfeld (1853-1940) took over. Unlike in earlier periods, this time the Ottoman authorities were dealing with an erudite German partner with a serious reputation and scholarly experience. Dörpfeld's priorities were of a very different nature than Schliemann's. He was not looking for recognition in a way Schliemann had done; his interest was scholarly and he acted in accordance with the regulations and handed in the finds discovered at Troy. Finally, the most valuable artefacts were included in the Troy collection of the Imperial Museum in Istanbul.

With the Battle of Gallipoli, in 1915, the myth of Troy received a wholly new dimension. The story of the Trojan War had introduced the first heroes of history. During the Trojan War, the Trojan warriors, supported by other Anatolian nations, had defended their country on the Asian shore of the Dardanelles against enemies from the west. More than 3,000 years later, in the Battle of Gallipoli, Ottoman troops from all over the Empire fought against the Western allies in the same region. These new Anatolian heroes of the Dardanelles managed to stop the enemy: the Battle of Gallipoli resulted in an Ottoman victory. The most important hero of the Dardanelles was the Ottoman commander Mustafa Kemal

(1881-1938), later to be known as Atatürk, the first president of the Republic of Turkey (1923). The story of Troy had become part of the origins of the Turkish nation.