MÎZÂN

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Intercultural Aspects
in and around Turkic Literatures

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Illustration on the cover: „Dokunmayın çiçek açtım" by Nilgün Güney, Nicosia.

The signet on the cover was designed by Anwārī al Ḥusaynī and symbolizes a scale.

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Prologue

"Tâtsız türk bolmas, başsız börk bolmas"

Martin Strohmeier

Perhaps it is not a coincidence that most of the conferences which the Department of Turkish and Middle Eastern Studies has organized – on the "Languages and Cultures of the Countries on the Silk Road" (1994), on "Cyprus and the Eastern Mediterranean: History, Literature and Culture in the Ottoman Period and After" (2002) – have been devoted to the themes of encounter in the broad sense. At least in part this has to do with the position of Cyprus at the crossroads of three continents and the fact that it is a meeting place of diverse cultures. The present volume, the result of a conference entitled "Intercultural aspects in and around Turkic literatures" (2003) continues this trend with a marked emphasis on language and literature.

It seems that the concept of identity is crucial to many of the topics explored in the following chapters. We are all as individuals, societies, and nations involved in a continuous process of defining ourselves, our interests and goals, drawing boundaries and trying to achieve affirmation and distinction. One of the main tools of identity building or the construction of the self is the construction of the other.

Literature often reflects the ongoing process of an individual's or a social group's effort to define and project itself by negatively portraying the other's attempts at self-definition. Many of the Turkish novels of the late 19th century focused on a critique of the extravagant Ottoman youth of superficially westernized circles. ʿAlî Bey in Nâmıq Kemâl's *İntibâh* or Bihruz Bey in Recâʾîzâde Ekrem's novel *ʿAraba Sevdâ'sı* are stereotypical alafranga characters[1] who have rejected their own cultural identity and attempted to assume the appearance of a culture of which they possess no understanding. Kemâl, Ekrem and other Ottoman authors who dealt with this theme were not anti-European per se. Rather, they were concerned with developing and projecting an authentic Ottoman identity. The negative stereotypes they employed in their novels refer not to Europeans, bu to their characters' frivolous and ruinous attempts to become an improperly understood other.

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1 They can also be found in Arabic literature of the same period, e.g. in a short story by Salîm al-Bustânî entitled "Bint al-ʿAsr" (published in the Beiruti journal *al-Jinân*) in which a couple, Jamîla and Anîs, represent the negative side of westernization, see Zachs 2005: 73–74.

The concept of the inimical other is not an invention of the age of nationalism. It can be found for example among the ancient Greeks who perceived the world in terms of civilized Greeks and barbarian others. The image of the other, e.g. of a neighbouring people, is often designed as a counter image in order to facilitate group identification and coherence. The German poet of the wars of liberation, Ernst-Moritz Arndt, argued that mutual hatred between nations was acceptable and even useful: "What is the harm to a Frenchman if a German calls him a bag of wind, a fool…what is the harm to a German if a Frenchman calls him a German ass, a drunkard, a pedant…let the prejudice of one nation against another stand as a charitable partition…Thus hatred remains as a holy and protective delusion in the nation…so we do not end up as feeble images which resemble everything and nothing…".[2]

We cannot today regard hostile images as complacently as Arndt. Many of the atrocities committed in the 20th century against ethnic groups, were made possible by reducing individuals and groups to grotesque stereotypes. Since the second half of the 20th century we have become steadily more aware of the potentially destructive impact of stereotypes and the need to study them.

It is almost impossible to speak about Turkic languages present and past without referring to the manifold contacts with other languages. The vast geographic distribution of Turkic peoples and their many migrations brought them into contact with, to name just a few, Mongolian, Iranian, Semitic, Slavic, Greek, and Chinese languages. These contacts developed predominantly from the 10th century onwards in the framework of the universalistic Islamic civilization. In Central Asia, Islam spread among the Turks garbed in the Persian language, the lingua franca in West and Central Asia. The Turks became integrated into the *umma*, the community of believers, increasing the importance of the Turkish language. The close contact between the Persian and Turkish element is evidenced by a saying in the famous 11th century dictionary *Dîvân luġât at-Turk* of Maḥmûd al-Kašġarî: "Tâtsız türk bolmas, başsız börk bolmas", meaning: "a Turk without a Persian does not exist as much as there is no hat without a head" (Dankoff 1982, I: 273; cfr. Fragner 1999: 41–42). Yet, under the umbrella of the umma, ethnic and regional differences and conflicts existed. There were prejudices, e.g. in the imagery of Persian poetry the term "Turk" was employed for the cruel lover who was seen as young, violent and always disposed to ignore the feelings of the other (Fragner 1999: 20). In later periods there were efforts of emphasising the "own" language: The 15th century author ʿAlî Šîr Nawâʾî in his *Muḥâkamat al-luġatayn* ("The trial of the two languages") tried to establish his native Chaghatay as a literary language which was equal to Persian.

In modern times, one should not forget the contacts of the Turkic languages with each other. As a case in point we can mention the Tatars of the Kazan region who were instrumental in the Islamization and modernization of other Turkic peoples of Central Asia in the 19th century (Boeschoten 1998: 7). The collapse of the Soviet

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2   "Über Volkshaß", in. Arndt ʿ ⸱ ⸱ [1993: 333–334].

Union and the establishment of Turkic states in the Caucasus and Central Asia created the conditions for a closer interaction with Turkey, leading to the adoption of the Latin alphabet for several Turkic languages outside Turkey.

The Ottoman Empire provided for numerous contacts between the various languages spoken and written by its inhabitants. The educational ideal among the Muslims consisted of learning the language triad in Islam (*elsine-i selâse*): Arabic, Persian and Turkish. Christian communities such as the Greek-Orthodox in Anatolia, the Karamanli (*Karamanlidhes*), until their resettlement in Greece used Turkish in Greek script. Likewise, Armenians used the Ottoman language in Armenian script in the 19th century. At the end of the 18th century Italian and especially French started to exert an increasing influence through translations into Turkish. Many of these translations were made by Armenians and Greeks (not only by Greeks of Istanbul, but also by Muslims who lived in Greek speaking parts of the Empire, e.g. in Crete). Nevertheless, there were also voices which pointed out the dangers which came from translations and which insisted on the precedence of the "own" language over others (Kreiser 2001: 68, 70).

The Ottoman language itself with the many words from the Arabic, Persian, Greek and other languages reflects exchanges between the communities. On the other hand, language interpenetration should not be confused with a fully-fledged multiculturalism. The Ottoman Empire once was likened to a house where its occupants met only in the corridors.[3] While scholars may disagree regarding the degree of intermingling that took place among the different ethnic groups, it cannot be denied that nationalism was to obstruct and reduce multiculturalism. Although the hydra of excessive nationalisms by no means is dead, we now live in an era in which substantial progress has been made towards multilingualism and multiculturalism.

Against this backdrop, the present volume tries to bring together discourses on linguistic and cultural pluralism, on globalization and cosmopolitanism, as well as on regionalism and localism as they are reflected in Turkic literatures. Special thanks are due to Matthias Kappler who organized the conference and edited this book.

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3   As observed by a reviewer of the first edition of Harry Luke's *The Making of Modern Turkey* (London: Macmillan 1936), see Luke 1955: 8.

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