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Persian in the Lands of Rum: Texts, Translations and Courtly Patronage

Abstract

Persian texts composed in Anatolia both in the pre-Ottoman and Ottoman periods have received scant scholarly attention, and Persian remains perceived as an alien language. This article presents an overview of Persian in Anatolia and the Ottoman empire from the twelfth to nineteenth centuries. It argues that in the medieval period Persian texts were more widely disseminated than is often assumed, and goes on to analyse the changing fate of Persian over the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and the reasons for its eclipse by Turkish. Finally, it presents manuscript evidence to suggest that even in the later Ottoman period, Persian was far from being restricted to a source of literary models.

Keywords: Persian, Anatolia, Ottoman Empire, Turkish

Writing at the end of the fourteenth century in central Anatolia, the emigree author ʿAzīz b. Ardashīr Astarābādī painted a singular picture of the place of Persian in the lands of Rum. Explaining why he had written *Bazm u Razm*, his panegyric history of the ruler of Sivas, the qadi Burhān al-Dīn (r. 783–800/1381–1398), in this language, he remarked that it was because,

> the people of the country of Rum prefer the Persian language (*zabān-i fārsī*) and like it, and all the inhabitants of this land speak Dari (*darī qāyil va nāṭiq*), and all the proverbs, orders, correspondence, accounting, registers, laws and so on are in this language.[1]

Astarābādī's emphasis on the wide spread of Persian can hardly be taken at face value. In Anatolia, Persian always existed in a multilingual environment; in the thirteenth century, a Persian source makes reference to the 'five languages that are widely spoken in Anatolia' (*panj zabān ki dar bilād-i Rūm bīshtar-i khalq bidān mukālama namāyand*), which are not specified but are usually presumed to comprise Persian, Turkish, Greek, Armenian and Arabic (although Syriac might also be intended).[2] While Armenian and Syriac were probably largely restricted to specific ethno-religious groups, there is plenty of evidence Greek was spoken and understood by Muslims; it may have been the first language of Anatolia's Seljuk sultans, and passages in Greek transcribed

1 Astarābādī 1928, 537.

2 Ibn Bībī 1390, 77; Shukurov 2013, 131–2. Clearly this does not take account of the numerous other languages that would have been spoken, such as Kurdish, Georgian and so on.

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into Arabic script can be found in the works of Persian poets from Anatolia such as Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī and Sulṭān Walad.[3] However, there is little reason to think that it was ever widely used by Muslims for literary purposes. Broadly speaking, Arabic was restricted to the fields of religion, science and epigraphy, and certain legal or administrative documents such as *waqfiyyas*, while Persian was, for most of the period of early Turkish rule, the main language of literature and administration in Muslim courts in Anatolia.

In practice, the boundaries between these linguistic and even literary communities were probably more fluid than is often imagined.[4] It is clear, too, that by the time Astarābādī was writing, Turkish was emerging as a competitor to Persian, and, at least in parts of Anatolia, it had supplanted the latter not merely as a spoken but also as a literary and administrative language.[5] Yet Astarābādī is notably silent over the Turkophone literary activities of his patron Burhān al-Dīn, who was not only ruler but also one of the earliest Turkish Sufi poets, instead mentioning only his compositions in Arabic and Persian.[6] That Turkish did not exist in a totally different sphere is confirmed by the fact that Khalīl b. Aḥmad al-Sulṭānī, scribe of the earliest manuscript of Astarābādī's Persian *Bazm u Razm*, was in fact also the copyist of the unique extant manuscript of Burhān al-Dīn's Turkish *dīvān*.[7] Astarābādī's silence over Turkish is suggestive of some of the complexities of a multilingual environment: for his audience, Astarābādī wished to underline his patron's engagement with what we might describe as 'high' Islamic culture through composing Arabic and Persian texts, and to emphasise the way in which Burhān al-Dīn's domains were integrated into the broader Islamic ecumene through their use of Persian. Indeed Astarābādī's own Persian, as he himself mentions, is deliberately admixed with numerous Arabic expressions, in accordance with his aim that it should read by 'sultans of the world, and the amassed kings of the Arabs and ʿAjam'.[8] This underlines the way in which language choice was determined not simply by comprehensibility but by political and cultural agendas.

Nonetheless, we also cannot dismiss Astarābādī's observation about the prevalence of Persian out of hand, even though we may wish to qualify it. Astarābādī's comments stand in stark contrast to the tendency in much modern scholarship to describe Persian as the elite language of a largely émigré or Iranianised elite, broadly restricted to the major urban centres and high literature, an interpretation especially emphasised by Muḥammad Amīn Riyāḥī in his seminal survey of Persian literature in the Otto-

3 Burguière and Mantran 1952; Pfifer 2021, 84–9; Shukurov 2013, 131–2.
4 See Pfifer 2021.
5 Peacock 2019, 147–87.
6 Astarābādī 1928, 488–9; 531–2; cf. Peacock 2016, 127–8.
7 See Karjoo-Ravary 2022, 7; 11. Burhān al-Dīn's Turkish *dīvān* survives in London, British Library, MS Or. 4126, copied by Khalīl b. Aḥmad in 796/1393–1394; his copy of Astarābādī's *Bazm u Razm* is preserved in Istanbul, Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi, MS Ayasofya 3465, which was transcribed in Sivas from a draft on 1 Rajab 800/21 March 1398.
8 Astārābādī 1928, 537; 32.

man lands, but one also followed by more recent western scholars.[9] İnan, for example, stresses that Persian was promoted by the Ottoman court as part of its imperial ambitions, and even Persian's enduring popularity in Mevlevi circles seems only to confirm this pattern of its elite associations, given the close links between the Ottoman dynasty and the *ṭarīqa*.[10] Indeed, the status of Persian as an 'outsiders'' language is reflected in the publication, or lack of it, of Persian texts from Anatolia and the Ottoman lands. Even major historical works in Persian dealing with Ottoman history, such as the important chronicle of Shukrullāh, the *Bahjat al-Tavārīkh* (c. 864/1459), remain unpublished in the original.[11] While scholars in Iran have recently devoted some efforts to publish works from Anatolia, such publications have often failed to achieve much currency in Ottomanist circles.[12]

The vast topic of Persian in Anatolia and the Ottoman lands, with its history stretching from the twelfth to nineteenth century, deserves more detailed study. In this paper, I wish to address three interrelated topics that I hope will give some impression of at least the contours of this literary tradition, and point to avenues for future research. Firstly, I wish to look at the early phases of Persian in Anatolia, and try to address the contradiction with which I started: was Persian in medieval Anatolia the rarified tongue of the elite as much scholarship suggests, and as it was no doubt in later periods, or did it in fact have the wide currency that Astarābādī suggests? I will try to demonstrate that Persian was considerably more widely spread in the medieval period than is often appreciated, including in relatively remote and rural areas where courtly literature was also consumed. As a corollary of this argument, I then examine the changing status of Persian: there is no doubt that by the sixteenth century its status was much more that of an elite language, and this was precisely why it was patronised. I try to suggest how and why this change came about. Thirdly, I will address the role of Persian texts and translations in the formation of a courtly cultural identity in the sixteenth century. Finally, I will give some examples that suggest the longevity of the Persian literary tradition in Anatolia and the Ottoman Empire, and the need for further research on this field.

In his 1945 survey of the early Persian literature of Anatolia from the twelfth to the fourteenth century, the Turkish scholar of Persian Ahmet Ateş posed the question of 'in what circles did that language [Persian] spread and what was the level of its use?'[13] Ateş divided the development of Persian literature in Anatolia into two phases. In the first, from the twelfth century till the accession of the Seljuk sultan ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn Kayqubād in 1219, a local literature that was wholly free of Sufi, Iranian influences devel-

9 Riyāḥī 1990; cf. Hillenbrand 2005; İnan 2019; Kim 2018, 221–2.

10 İnan 2019, 77–80.

11 On this work see Yıldız 2010; Yıldız 2012, 443–50.

12 For one such work see Qāżīzāda-yi Ardabīlī 2021. Some Persian chronicles of the Ottomans have also recently been published in Turkey in Turkish translation (e.g. Fidan 2023, Yıldırım 2024) but the scholarly value of these works is severely compromised by the absence of the original Persian text.

13 Ateş 1945, 94.

oped, in which occult works such as the compositions of the local scholar Ḥubaysh al-Tiflisī, who served the Seljuq court, played a prominent part; these works were written for a 'broad public' (*geniş bir okuyucu kütlesi için yazılmıştır*).[14] Ateş emphasised the comparatively wide spread of Persian even at this early date, including to second rank provincial centres like Ankara, from which fragments of a poetic anthology have come down to us, alongside the existence of works of elaborate prose. According to Ateş, it was only in the subsequent period, from the reign of ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn Kayqubād onwards, after 616/1219, that Sufism became a significant element in the Anatolian Persian literature, largely as the result of refugees fleeing the Mongol invasions. In his survey of the Persian literature of Anatolia and the Ottoman empire, Riyāḥī agreed with the general picture presented by Ateş, with slight differences of periodisation.[15] Riyāḥī also emphasised the Khurasani character of immigration to Anatolia,[16] which he saw as giving rise to tensions with the local population that are reflected in the literature, a theme left undiscussed by Ateş. Yet Ateş's intriguing, and provocative, statement that the early works of Anatolian Persian literature were written for a 'broad public'; has rarely been investigated, still less problematised. Given that most of our early texts were produced at the court of or at least for royal patrons, it is a somewhat surprising comment, which perhaps cannot be wholly dissociated from the difficult circumstances of mid twentieth century Turkey in which Ateş wrote, with Persian being regarded with some suspicion by the Republican authorities precisely because of its Sufi associations. In a sense, Ateş's words may have been intended to diffuse some of this suspicion by underlining the more 'secular' aspects of Anatolian Persian.

Today, we have a scattering more texts than Ateş did from the early period. For example, more recently discovered texts of which Ateş was unaware include our earliest Persian manuscript from Anatolia, a medical encyclopaedia originally composed in Central Asia, the *Hidāyat al-Mutaʿallimīn fī-l-Ṭibb*, a manuscript of which was copied for an amir of the Saltukid dynasty of Erzurum in 510/1116.[17] Meanwhile, one of our earliest known texts written for an Anatolian patron, the *Rawżat al-Nāẓir*, was composed in 558/1161–1162 for the Seljuq prince Naṣīr al-Dīn Berkyāruqshāh who at some point became holder of the appanage of Niksar in Northern Anatolia.[18] Intriguingly, both areas are far from what we consider to be the traditional centres of courtly Persianate culture in Anatolia, although the highly complex *inshāʾ* style of parts of the *Rawżat al-Nāẓir* suggests it is unlike to have been understood by all but the best educated, if at all: certainly, it is not aimed at a 'broad public'. Yet the manuscript evidence for the twelfth century is too scant to allow us to make many claims about the audiences of texts. While a more substantial body of literature does emerge in the early to mid-thirteenth century, it is only in the wake of the Mongol invasions,

14 *ibid*., 134.
15 Riyāḥi 1990, 23–73.
16 *ibid*., 82–7.
17 Süleymaniye MS Fatih 33; Peacock 2019, 33.
18 Süleymaniye, MS Ayasofya 3235. On the dedicatee see Riyāḥī 1990, 41. I am preparing a more detailed discussion of this manuscript.

in particular from the last quarter of the thirteenth century, that we start to see a significant increase in textual production, marked, for example, by the appearance of our first Persian histories of Anatolia.[19] We also find our first substantial corpuses of contemporary manuscripts that allow us to identify audiences and circulation of texts with some certainty. These suggest that at least for the early fourteenth century, Ateş's model of a wide diffusion of Persian literacy and literature holds true, albeit for a later period than he himself identified.

From this period, we have quite a number of Persian texts which we know to have been composed in second rank Anatolian towns such as Niğde, Sinop, and so on, away from the major courtly centres of Aksaray, Konya and Kayseri.[20] Among them are the encyclopaedic *al-Walad al-Shafiq*, composed by the qadi of Niğde in the early fourteenth century,[21] a series of texts on religion, administration and epistolography written for the Çobanid rulers of Kastamonu in northern central Anatolia in the late thirteenth to early fourteenth century,[22] and a poem praising the wealth and cosmopolitanism of the Black Sea port of Sinop.[23] To do justice to this provincial literature, which has barely been investigated by scholarship, is beyond the scope of this article, although the interested reader may consult the monograph of Bruno De Nicola (2024) for some impression of one such regional centre, Kastamonu. Here I provide a couple of further examples of manuscripts that illustrate this diffusion of Persian.

MS Leiden Or 1094 is a *majmūʿa* composed in the mid-fourteenth century, largely of Persian poetry, with some Arabic.[24] This *majmūʿa* is interesting in several respects. Compiled in the mid-fourteenth century in the second rank town of Akşehir in central Anatolia, not far from Konya, it contains numerous verses written by contemporary Anatolian Persian poets who are otherwise entirely unattested. Especially prominent among these are a family of Bukharan emigres who lived in Akşehir and were from their *nisba*s variously employed as astrologers, qadis, and panegyrists. The *majmūʿa* is testimony to a distinct regional Persian literary culture, but one which of course remained in touch with the Persian classics, as is suggested by the quotations from authors such as Saʿdī, Kamāl-i Khujandī and so on. In contrast to the Persian verses which suggest a degree of literary connoisseurship, the much less extensive Arabic excerpts in the anthology seem to have been primarily teaching materials. Another interesting aspect of the *majmūʿa* is the dedicatees of its verses, who are predominantly members of the local Akşehir elite, in particular leaders of the urban paramilitary fraternities, the *akhī*s. A number of poems are dedicated to senior figures in the Rifāʿī Sufi order, otherwise poorly attested in central Anatolia in the period. If anything, the

19 Melville 2006.

20 Cities such as Konya, Kayseri, Aksaray and Antalya regularly hosted the Seljuk sultans and their court, which moved seasonally between them. In contrast, 'second-rank' cities such as these were not regularly visited by the court on its seasonal movements.

21 Peacock 2004 and for the text's publication see now Niğdeli Ḳādī Aḥmed 2015.

22 De Nicola 2024.

23 Turan 1958, 157–62.

24 For a study of this manuscript see Bihnāmī 1398.

Akşehir *majmūʿa* shows us just how much we do not yet know about Persian literature in medieval Anatolia, its chance survival suggesting the existence of a vibrant provincial Persian literary culture independent of either court or the Iranian-influenced Sufi orders, the Rifāʿiyya being of Iraqi origin.

So much for one example of a provincial town and its Persianate culture. Akşehir, however, was in the proximity of central Anatolia, and the court. What of the countryside beyond? Here the evidence is sketchier, but I would like to adduce one further Persian manuscript as evidence for the wider diffusion of the language. This is a fragment of a verse epic on prophets, the *Anīs al-Qulūb*, composed by Burhān al-Dīn al-Anawī originally in the early thirteenth century for the Seljuq sultan ʿIzz al-Dīn Kaykāʾūs I (r. 608–616/1211–1219).[25] Until recently it was thought to exist in only one manuscript, probably dating to the early fourteenth century and attributed to Konya,[26] but recently one other fragment came to light,[27] written in 739/1339 for a certain Dāʾūd b. Yāvarī, an otherwise unattested amir. The unusual verse colophon of this poem concludes with giving us much information about Dāʾūd, who seems to have been a dispossessed amir. His ancestral estates, described in detail in the colophon, were evidently located in rural southwestern Anatolia, as it seems they were located in the lands of the Ḥamīdid beylik. This courtly text thus was being read a hundred years after its composition not only by Konya literati, but by an obscure military chief far from any urban centres. Not far away from this region, in İstanoz (modern Korkuteli, in the mountainous hinterland northwest of Antalya), illuminated manuscripts of the famous Persian Sufi work *Mirṣād al-ʿIbād* by Najm al-Dīn Rāzī, which had been originally dedicated to the Seljuk sultan ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn Kayqubād, were copied for members of the local Turkmen Ḥamīdid dynasty in 750/1349 and 752/1351.[28] The copying of both these texts, originally destined for the Seljuk court, for local patrons in the Anatolian countryside suggests the broad appeal of the literary tastes of the Seljuk court more than a century after these works were composed.

Such manuscripts indicate a rather wider diffusion of Persian in fourteenth-century Anatolia than commonly assumed. If we accept the picture I have argued for here, we must turn to the broader question of how and why Persian became constricted to a literary and migrant elite and was gradually replaced by Turkish as the primary literary vernacular of Muslim Anatolia. Again, here the lack of much published research and the exigencies of space mean that the discussion perforce will be highly schematic, attempting to put forward some hypotheses that may serve as a basis for future discussion and research. It is easy to fall into the teleological assumption that the displacement of Persian by Turkish was in some sense preordained: however, comparison with Iran, Central Asia and India suggests there is nothing inevitable whatsoever about the

25 Peacock 2015.
26 Süleymaniye, MS 2984, see Jackson 2017.
27 Süleymaniye MS Fatih 3532. This is an incomplete copy of the text, corresponding to ff. 132–195 of MS Ayasofya 2984.
28 Jackson 2020, 150–8.

choices of which languages do and do not become used for literary and administrative purposes.

The emergence of literary Turkish in Anatolia was contingent on three specific contexts: the use of Turkish in Sufi texts, the rise of beyliks in western Anatolia who sponsored translations into Turkish, and the influence of the Golden Horde on the other side of the Black Sea. The use of Turkish for Sufi works is seen in some of the earliest works of Anatolian Turkish literature that were imitations of Persian originals, such as ʿĀṣıḳ Paşa's *Ġarībnāme*, composed in the early fourteenth century in Kırşehir in central Anatolia. Turkish may have been chosen not simply out of a desire for comprehensibility, but owing to Sufi ideas about multilingualism as a symbol of divine communication. However, it is notable that there is no clear evidence of patronage of these early Kırşehir works, and ʿĀṣıḳ Paşa continued to compose in Persian for the Ilkhanid ruler Ghāzān.[29] Courtly patronage of works in Turkish is associated in particular with the western Anatolian beyliks of Aydın and Germiyan. The Turkish works produced in these regions largely comprised translations or adaptations of Arabic or Persian originals.[30] In both beyliks, however, original works in Persian and sometimes translations from Arabic into Persian were dedicated to the rulers. The choice to patronise Turkish translations must be seen then, not so much as a matter of linguistic necessity, but rather as a means of *translatio imperii*. As was the case in earlier Islamic history, with the translation programmes of the Abbasids in the ninth century and the Samanids in the tenth, and as we will see later in the Ottoman case in the sixteenth century, translation was as much about cultural appropriation, about asserting that one possessed the literary and intellectual resources of past empires, as anything else.[31] It is doubtless no coincidence that both the Aydınid and Germiyanid beyliks were located on the far peripheries of Anatolia, in regions which had not previously formed part of the Seljuk state, or else were barely integrated into it. This lack of an indigenous Islamic heritage in the beylik capitals of Birge and Kütahya must have meant the need to find alternative idioms of cultural expression particularly acute, and indeed, the Turkish translations are predominantly of Islamic classics.

A further impetus for the spread of Turkish was its rising status in the Golden Horde, where it became during the thirteenth century predominant literary and administrative language, setting a precedent Anatolian states could emulate. In addition, in the Golden Horde Turkish was already established as the main language of proselytization and to some degree religion, as is attested by early Turkish funerary inscriptions from the thirteenth century onwards. Preachers from the region were active throughout Anatolia, creating a body of Islamic texts in mixed Eastern-Anatolian Turkish (the so-called '*olga-bolga dili*') that were aimed at recent converts to Islam.[32]

Thus over the course of the fourteenth century the space available to Persian progressively narrowed. Notwithstanding the existence of the possibility of composing

29 Peacock 2019, 160–4.
30 *ibid*., 165–8; Yıldız 2016.
31 Gutas 1998; Peacock 2007.
32 Peacock 2019, 179–85.

in Turkish, of which the earliest securely dated Anatolian works date to the end of the thirteenth century, in the first half of the fourteenth century Persian remained the main medium even of works of vernacular literature aimed at converting unbelievers such as a copy of a popular religious treatise, the *Sirāj al-Qulūb* from the Germiyanid beylik. By the end of the century, Persian seemed to have largely retreated from this sort of vernacular religious literature which now became dominated by Turkish texts.[33] Indeed, Turkish starts to spread in the realm of religion such that by the beginning of the fifteenth century, even Mevlevi texts such as Aflāki's biography of Mevlānā are being translated into Turkish 'so that everyone can understand it'. Yet such a translation was in fact done not for some local Mevlevi lodge, but rather for the court of Sultan Murād II (r. 824–848 and 850–855/1421–1444 and 1446–1451).[34] As so often, the presence of substantial quotations of Persian without Turkish translation throughout the text, in particular of poetry, underlines the political and cultural message of appropriation behind such a project rather than simply one of linguistic necessity.

Thus the Ottomans came to embrace this courtly tradition of the cultivation of Turkish in certain contexts, which, as I have argued, was a distinctively (albeit not entirely exclusively) west Anatolian phenomenon,[35] and similarly reflects the Ottomans' own position initially as a polity on the margins of the *Dār al-Islām*, occupying, like the Germiyanids, barely islamised frontier space.[36] Yet there is relatively little evidence of any literary activity at the Ottoman court for the first century of its existence. While a Turkish appropriation of Persian epics is suggested by Aḥmedī's *İskendernāme*, composed c. 1400, which draws on both Firdawsī and Niẓāmī, the tentative beginnings of an Ottoman Turkish courtly literary tradition continued to be challenged by Persian. Indeed, the position of Persian as a courtly language was bolstered by the imperial ambitions of Meḥmed the Conqueror (r. 848–850 and 855–886/1444–1446 and 1451–1481) to whose court a large number of émigré writers – as well as artists, calligraphers, bookbinders, musicians and so on – from the east were attracted.[37] The stream of émigrés continued throughout the later fifteenth century and into the early sixteenth, encouraged both by the opportunities for patronage offered by the Ottoman attempts to create a true imperial court, and the disturbed political circumstances in much of the Iranian world in the later fifteenth century as

33 *ibid*., 191–217.

34 Zāhid b. ʿĀrif, *Maḫzenü'l-Esrār*, Süleymaniye, MS Ayasofya 3456.

35 As noted above, the major centres of Turkish literature were Aydın and Kütahya, in addition to the Sufi centre of Kırşehir, and the example of Qāḍī Burhān al-Dīn in Sivas. However, there is no early evidence for the production of texts in Turkish in traditional cultural centres such as Konya. It is worth noting, however, that there was a certain interest in Turkish literature among the fifteenth-century eastern Anatolian dynasties of the Karakoyunlu and the Akkoyunlu. For example, the Karakoyunlu ruler Cihān-şāh (d. 872/1467) was himself the author of both Turkish and Persian *dīvān*s (see Macit 2002). To date the interest in Turkish among these dynasties has received little attention, and certainly deserves further research.

36 Peacock 2019, 169–73.

37 Markiewicz 2019, 185–90; Sohrweide 1970.

both the Akkoyunlu and Timurid regimes collapsed. To be an émigré was perceived by jealous locals as a major advantage in attaining advancement at court; as the literary biographer Laṭīfī put it in some verses in his *teẕkire* of Ottoman poets, 'If you want to gain repute, come from the Arab lands or Persia.'[38]

Indeed, such was the vogue for employing émigré Iranians at the Ottoman court that on occasion we read of Anatolians who pretended to be Persian in order to attain career advancement. One such was the poet Leʾālī of Tokat who learned fluent Persian during his extensive travels in the Persian lands (*vilāyet-i ʿAcem*), and claimed to convey the blessings to an Anatolian audience of ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Jāmī (817–898/1414–1492), the noted Persian poet and Sufi of Herat who enjoyed a great vogue in Ottoman circles, and whom Meḥmed the Conqueror had even attempted unsuccessfully to attract to his court.[39] Along with his rhetorical skills and his refined behaviour (*letafet u zerafet*), Leʾālī gained an entrée to the salon of kings, and the company of 'sultans, kings and viziers'. However, he was eventually unmasked as an imposter – a *muteʿaccim*, someone pretending to Persian rather than the real thing – and was expelled from court (*ḳurb-i Padişahiden mehcur oldı*).[40]

As a result of this predilection for Persian over Turkish at court, in the catalogue of the Ottoman library produced for Bāyezīd II (r. 886–918/1481–1512), the overwhelming majority of poetry, for example, remains in Persian, although it does seem the sultan actively patronised Turkish verse.[41] Although Bāyezīd also patronised Turkish historical writing earlier in his reign,[42] from the turn of the sixteenth century Persian seemed to become increasingly in vogue. Indeed, despite the continuing process of adaptation of Arabic and Persian classics into Turkish which continued over the fifteenth century, on occasion for certain purposes the process could be reversed. This is illustrated by a series of texts extant in Persian and Turkish, notionally based on Greek originals, dealing with the history of the Ayasofya and the foundation of Constantinople, which evidence, as Stefan Yerasimos has shown, varying attitudes, both supportive of and opposed to Meḥmed's imperial project.[43] However, the account given in one of these texts of how it was turned into Persian offers a telling insight into the status of the language:

> One day, when in the street of poverty I had submitted to perplexity and was entangled in seclusion, suddenly a minister [*ʿazīzī*] arrived and presented a treatise. I saw that it was the history of the Ayasofya translated from Christian language into Turkish. I said to him, 'What do you want?' He said, 'Why don't you translate this

38 Laṭīfī 2000, 474: *Olmaḳ isterseñ iʿtibāra maḥall/Yaʿarabdan yāḫud ʿacemden gel*; cf. the complaints of ʿĀşıḳ Çelebi, cited in Markiewicz 2019, 188.

39 Losensky 2008.

40 Laṭīfī 2000, 473–5.

41 Kim 2019, 642; cf. Csirkes 2019.

42 On Bāyezīd's patronage of Turkish historiography see Kastritsis 2017, 1–8; 36–7, with references to older scholarship.

43 Yerasimos 1990 and for an edition and discussion of two of the Turkish texts see Okuyucu and Uluoğlu 2022.

> strange story into Persian, and treat the histories and tales of the building of Ayasofya which are recorded in this treatise in an attractive format and marvellous way, so that Persian travellers and Rumi dandies [*musāfirān-i ʿajam va ẓurafā-yi Rūm*] who wonder at the sight of this building should be able to benefit from it and learn the truth of the different tales which circulate orally.'[44]

Persian thus was now the language of the elegant [*ẓurafāʾ*], and was also useful because it could broadcast the imperial message to foreigners. This was doubtless one reason for the widespread employment of Persian in historical works that aimed to promote the achievements of the dynasty. Nonetheless, the principal audience doubtless remained the Ottoman court. Thus the translation of this version of the Ayasofya legend from the 'language of Rum' (*zabān-i rūmī*) to Persian, tellingly called here *zabān-i darī*, or 'courtly language,' was commissioned by Meḥmed the Conqueror in 885/1480,[45] and was then reworked for Bāyezīd II by a later author who found its style inelegant.[46]

A further determinant of court tastes was doubtless the background of many of its participants. As noted, émigrés from the east flocked to the Ottoman court in the second half of the fifteenth century onwards, and many of the authors of Persian texts destined for an Ottoman audience, like İdrīs-i Bidlīsī (d. 926/1520), who has been the subject of two major recent studies,[47] were themselves émigrés, and the works they composed were intended both to assert their claim to advancement by exhibiting their mastery over Persian, as well as addressing their fellow bureaucrats. If anything, the role of Persian actually increased in literary and political discourse throughout the reign of Selīm I (r. 918–926/1512–1520), as the empire expanded eastwards, and men of letters from the newly conquered territories vied to exhibit their literary skills to the sultan.[48]

We should remember, however, that not all of this 'Persianisation' in this period was entirely voluntary, and it could be tinged with hints of resistance to the Ottomans. One example is a certain Qāżīzāda-yi Ardabīlī, who was captured by Selīm I after Chaldiran, during his shortlived occupation of Tabriz in 920/1514. Evidently Selīm decided that Qāżīzāda-yi Ardabīlī would be a useful ornament to his court, for he deported him to Istanbul, where he was given an income of 80 *aḳçes*.[49] Qāżīzāda composed two works at the behest of the Ottoman court: firstly a Persian translation of Ibn Khallikān's famous Arabic biographical dictionary, the *Wafāyāt al-Aʿyān*,[50] and

44 Darvīsh Shams-i Dīn, Süleymaniye, MS Ayasofya 3336, 2a–2b. Another Persian version: MS Ayasofya 3025.

45 Darvīsh Shams-i Dīn, Süleymaniye, MS Ayasofya 3336, 33b.

46 The reworked version was entitled *Qalʿa-yi Qusṭanṭiniyya va Binā-yi Ayāṣufyā* (Süleymaniye, MS Ayasofya 3024), and was composed in 905/1499–1500 by Aḥmad b. Aḥmad al-Jilyānī the *munshī*.

47 Genç 2019; Markiewicz 2019.

48 Markiewicz 2019, 188–9.

49 For a survey of his life and works, see the editor's introduction to Qāżīzāda-yi Ardabīlī 2021.

50 Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi, MS Ahmet III 2986.

a work on Selīm's conquest of Syria and Egypt. Qāżīzāda tells us that he had begged to be allowed to accompany Selīm on one of his Iranian campaigns but this was rejected – as we shall see, quite correctly. Instead, Qāżīzāda was permitted to be in the sultan's entourage when the Syrian campaign of 922/1516 was launched. His account is in fact one of the most detailed and valuable first hand accounts of the Ottoman conquest of the Arab lands, but been largely ignored by scholars, its cause no doubt not helped by its employment of the rhetorical *inshā'* style also favoured by Bidlīsī. Yet his *Ghazavāt* also disguised under its elaborate prose hints of criticism of Selīm, praise of Iran and advocacy of the author's Shiite beliefs – presumably exactly the opposite of what the Ottoman court wished for.[51] Indeed, Qāżīzāda eventually was executed on accusations of being league with the Safavids and participating in a revolt in Egypt. Unlike Bidlīsī, his works only survive in a very small number of copies, and the *Ghazavāt* in a unique manuscript.

Why was someone like Qāżīzāda employed, given the entirely justified suspicions of his loyalty? Most probably simply because, for all the jobbing bureaucrats in Istanbul like Bidlīsī, composing elaborate *inshā'* works in praise of the sultan, the demand for authors able to write such works outstripped supply. Selīm himself authored poetry in Persian;[52] numerous *Selīmname*s, both in Turkish and Persian, were composed commemorating his exploits;[53] and projects of translation such as that of the *Wafāyāt* fed into Selīm's ambition to create a great Perso-Islamic court. This is not to say Turkish was not also patronised: probably the majority of *Selīmnāme*s composed were in Turkish. Yet it suggests that it still could not compete in prestige with Persian, as the Sultan's own predilection for Persian suggests: in contrast to his successor, his *dīvān* contains no Turkish verses at all, reflecting the relatively marginal status of Turkish as a literary language in the eyes of the Ottoman court.

Nonetheless the composition of Turkish *Selīmnāme*s does mark a gradual shift in literary tastes, with the emergence of a courtly Turkish historiographical tradition modelled on that in Persian: the relatively few earlier Turkish histories, like that of ʿĀṣıḳpaşazāde, tend to be plain in language and much more closely related to spoken Turkish. As Christopher Markiewicz has noted, the production of stylistically elaborate histories in Persian like the works of İdrīs-i Bidlīsī for an Ottoman audience 'awakened certain segments of the Ottoman court to the possibility of producing histories in an elevated Turkish prose style.'[54] It seems under Süleymān the Magnificent (r. 926–974/1520–1566), much greater efforts were devoted to developing Turkish a medium of high literature, as well as administration. To do this it was necessary to appropriate in a much more comprehensive way the Persian and Arabic literary tradition – or at least those bits of it that were considered especially relevant. This process remains far too little studied, but the example of the Bursa Sufi author Lāmiʿī Çelebi

51 Qāżīzāda-yi Ardabīlī 2021, editor's introduction, xxxiii–xxxiv.

52 *Dīvān-i Salīmī*, Süleymaniye, MSS Esad Efendi 3422; Atif Efendi 2078; Nuruosmaniye 3827.

53 Uğur 2009.

54 Markiewicz 2019, 92.

(878–938/1472–1532) gives some indication of the means and ways of this appropriation.[55] While Lāmiʿī remained based in Bursa, he received significant patronage from members of the Ottoman court. The translations and adaptations of Lāmiʿī show how the Ottoman court and its litterateurs sought to model themselves on the dazzling achievements of late Timurid Herat, whose culture under Sulṭān-Ḥusayn Bāyqarā (r. 873–911/1469–1506) was admired throughout the Islamic east.

Not coincidentally, Lāmiʿī himself was connected to the Timurid court in Herat both by family association and religious inclination. His grandfather, Naḵḵāş ʿAlī, had been deported by Timur to Samarqand, where he had learned the art of illustration; and he was affiliated with the Naqshbandi order, and much of his work was devoted to Ottomanising the works of its two great Herat representatives, ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Jāmī and Mīr ʿAlī Shīr Navāʾī (844–906/1441–1501), the famous Chaghatay poet. Among his numerous Ottoman translations are versions of Jāmī's *Shavāhid al-Nubuvva* and his collection of biographies of notable Sufis, the *Nafaḥāt al-Uns*, but these went far beyond simply conveying the original meaning into Turkish. It is doubtless no coincidence that Navāʾī had also rendered the *Nafaḥāt al-Uns* into Chaghatay in 901/1495, adding the biographies of various Turkish Sufis that Jāmī's original had not discussed. Lāmiʿī adopted exactly the same strategy with his Ottoman version, supplementing the original with various Anatolian Sufis. In this sense we can see the project as imitative not just of Jāmī but also of Navāʾī. Yet despite the text's pious subject-matter, Lāmiʿī explicitly associates his translation with the Ottoman imperial project, devoting a section of his introduction to Süleymān's victorious campaign against Belgrade that had annexed this city to the empire, and describing preparations for the Mohács campaign of 932/1526.[56] Indeed, because of the coincidence of the campaign with the completion of the translation, Lāmiʿī renamed his version of the *Nafaḥāt* the *Futūḥ al-Mucāhedīn li-Terviḥ Ḳulūbi'l-Muşāhidīn*, suggesting the text's role as an inspiration to the victorious sultanic armies.

This interest in the culture of Timurid Herat in Süleyman's empire was not restricted to translations. Lāmiʿī's original works also frequently allude directly or indirectly the Timurid court of Herat, and his Turkish *Leṭāʾif* also contains exemplary stories of Sulṭān-Ḥusayn Bāyqarā and his circle.[57] Doubtless a subtext of this was the hope that the indigent Lāmiʿī might receive royal patronage matching that of Jāmī, rewarding his appropriation of the literary and religious culture of Herat and its adaptation to an Ottoman environment. Nonetheless, it is striking that Lāmiʿī himself very rarely wrote in Persian. The one exception to this is his *dīvān*.[58] Its preface, written when the poet was 58 years old in 936/1528, boasts implicitly of Lāmiʿī's immersion in Persian literary culture.[59] Lāmiʿī quotes extensively from the Persian classics such as Ḥāfiẓ,

55 For a survey of his life and work see Kut 1976; also Laṭīfī 2000, 475–80; and for his translation activities Hagen 2003.
56 Jāmī 1980, 9–10.
57 Lāmiʿī Çelebi 2015, 51–2; 59; 60–2.
58 Lāmiʿī Çelebi, MS Millet Ali Emin Manzum 380.
59 *ibid*., f. 29a.

Rūmī, Saʿdī, Niẓāmī and Jāmī, and even occasionally Firdawsī, and indeed does not mention a single Turkish poet, although the preface does contain some Turkish verses presumably of Lāmiʿī's own composition. Nonetheless, the extensive quotations of Persian poetry indicate the text was designed for those who shared the poet's own Persianate education. Moving on to the first book of the *dīvān* itself, it comprises *qaṣīda*s in praise of God and sultans, Bāyezīd, Selīm and Süleymān. After an opening poem in praise of God in Turkish, Lāmiʿī gives a Persian poem of his own which is described as a *naẓīre* of Jāmī's *Rawżat al-Akhyār*. There follow *qaṣīda*s for the Ottoman sultans Lāmiʿī had served: one in Turkish for Bāyezīd, two in Turkish and one in Persian for Selīm, and seven *qaṣīda*s for Süleymān of which two are in Persian, five in Turkish. The point seems to be not just to emphasise the poet's equal mastery of Persian verse, but also implicitly to show that Turkish has now reached the level of Persian. Nonetheless, it is striking that this kind of linguistic experimentation is restricted to the first book of the *dīvān*, dealing with God and sultans. Later books, which include verses in praise of Lāmiʿī's other patrons such as vizier İbrāhīm Paşa, are entirely in Turkish.

Lāmiʿī's works thus reflect two trends that become increasingly pronounced over the sixteenth century. The first, as is illustrated by Lāmiʿī's adaptation of Jāmī's text to Ottoman circumstances, is the use of translation and adaptation as a type of *translatio imperii*, as we have seen before with the Aydınid case. The second is the ever narrower literary space for Persian over the sixteenth century, as Turkish began to emerge increasingly as a marker of dynastic identity, a trend which was doubtless exacerbated if not precipitated by the ongoing Ottoman-Safavid conflict. Here, the written language of official communications seems to have played a role in defining each side against the other, irrespective of the actual languages spoken by the ruling dynasties which of course in both cases were mutually intelligible forms of Turkish. Thus while Persian historical texts – especially emulations of the *Shāhnāma* – did continue to be composed for Süleymān and even his successors Selīm II and Murād III, they were increasingly overshadowed by Turkish production,[60] and the market for émigré bureaucrats and intellectuals reduced as more suitably trained literati versed in Ottoman Turkish started to emerge. This is not to deny of course, that many poets produced Persian verses, and occasionally Arabic too, alongside Turkish ones, but these seem mainly to have been exercises in demonstrating their mastery of poetic forms rather than serious attempts to propagate Persian as a vehicle for literature in the Ottoman court. Interest in Persian was rather expressed through the translations of classics such as Saʿdī's *Gulistān*, Ghazālī's *Kīmyā-yi Saʿādat*, and Kāshifī's *Akhlāq-i Muḥsinī*. Often such translations were dedicated to either sultan Süleymān himself or other members of the court,[61] who would have had a decent grounding in Persian in any event, as is attested by the numerous references to earlier Persian writers in both Süleymān's Turkish verse and his own Persian *dīvān*,[62] further pointing to the role of translation as a sort of *translatio imperii* rather than as a practical necessity. We can

60 Yıldız 2012, 496; 501.
61 Çelebioğlu 1994, 117–20.
62 Şahin 2023, 51–5.

assume that a similarly ideological purpose underlay the translation of Persian works of a more local relevance, such as Shukrullāh's *Bahjat al-Tavārīkh* which attempted to situate the Ottomans in a broader context of universal and Islamic history, of which a translation was dedicated to Süleymān's vizier İbrāhīm Paşa.[63]

Although there is sporadic evidence of original Persian composition in later periods at the Ottoman court – such as the Persian poems of Nefʿī (d. 1044/1635),[64] which were, however, overshadowed by the renown of his Turkish *dīvān* – by the end of the sixteenth century, it has been argued that 'the period of high Persian influence at the Ottoman court' had come to an end.[65] This is reflected in modern scholarship. For example Sooyong Kim's very useful chapter on Persian in Anatolia and the Ottoman empire devotes only four pages to the period between c. 1600 and the end of the Ottoman empire, much of which is taken up with a discussion of Persian influences on Ottoman poets such as Galip.[66] Riyāḥī's magisterial *Zabān va Adab-i Fārsī dar Qalamraw-i ʿUs̱mānī* devotes half a page only of very brief notes to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, although he does intriguingly mention a little noticed revival of interest in Persian under Selīm III (r. 1203–1222/1789–1807), including such unanticipated works such as a Persian account of the French revolution dedicated to the Sultan, and this period is in need of further investigation.[67]

Throughout the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries, Persian retained an important place in the educational curriculum, as it was hardly possible to read the Ottoman classics without a mastery of their Persian inspirations. It also retained a singular place in Mevlevi circles, and Persian was taught and consumed in grandee households, in Sufi lodges, and public mosques, with Sufis – and in particular Mevlevis – often acting as intermediaries between these spheres.[68] The Ottoman place in the Persianate world was also asserted by the work of translating and appropriating Persian classics, which acquired a new dimension with the establishment of state-sponsored 'translation committee' to render Arabic and Persian works into Turkish by Grand Vizier Nevşehirli Dāmād İbrāhīm Paşa (d. 1143/1730). These included relatively recent compositions such as Iskandar Munshī's *Tārīkh-i ʿĀlam-ārā-yi ʿAbbāsī* alongside classics. Interestingly, we find texts originally translated in the sixteenth century or earlier translated into Ottoman afresh by the committee, among others, of the *Akhlāq-i Muḥsinī* and *Kalīla wa-Dimna*.[69] Doubtless, to some extent the need for new translations reflected changing tastes in literary style, as the Turkish language developed. However, the need for a comprehensible version is only one motive for translation, and not necessarily the most important, and translations into Turkish of Persian texts exhibit a

63 Yıldız 2010.
64 Nefʿī 2019.
65 Kim 2018, 233; cf. Yıldız 2012, 501–2.
66 Kim 2018, 235–9.
67 Riyāḥī 1990, 199–200.
68 Gürbüzel 2023, 156–77.
69 Aydüz 1997; İpşirli 1987.

wide variety of approaches – and fidelity – to the original.[70] Given that, again, all the dedicatees of these translations would have received a solid foundation in Arabic and Persian, it seems likely that the translation project was, as in the sixteenth century, above all associated with a programme of revitalisation, through the appropriation of Persian and Islamic classics. However, this promotion of a Persianate identity was not a neutral choice. The connections of Persian with certain Sufi orientated strands of piety and indeed, it has been argued, with an openness to innovation in religion, led to it on occasion, if perhaps in jest, being characterised as the 'language of hellfire'.[71]

If the patronage and composition of original Persian texts evidently declined after c. 1600, or even 1520, with Süleymān's accession, this did not mean the demise of knowledge of Persian, or of the Ottoman elite's desire to associate themselves with the broader Persianate culture. Even in the post-Tanzimat era of westernisation, a poet such as Yeñişehirli ʿAvnī Bey (1242–1301/1826–1883) could compose a Persian *dīvān*.[72] It seems that the decline of Persian, at least in the provinces, was a late nineteenth century phenomenon,[73] although it is likely there was significant regional variation depending on cultural factors, with Persian retaining its importance for Mevlevi communities until the foundation of the Republic. Indeed, even in the adjoining provinces of Ottoman Bosnia and Albania, Persian seems to have met different fates, maintaining, as we shall see, a much greater currency in Albania.[74] Nonetheless, it must be emphasised that our current state of knowledge of Persian in the Ottoman lands, especially after the sixteenth century, remains seriously under-researched, and the picture presented above may well have to be modified in future. I wish to conclude by mentioning two very different manuscripts that offer us fresh insights into the later use of Persian in the Ottoman lands.

My first example is a manuscript now held in the Dār al-Kutub in Cairo, bearing the title *Fatḥnāma-yi Sulṭān Muḥammad*, which has to date escaped the attention of researchers, perhaps because of its title and location.[75] The subject of this verse history is not, as one might initially expect, Meḥmed the Conqueror, who was the subject of several Persian verse chronicles.[76] Rather, and much more surprisingly, it is an account of the campaigns of Sultan Meḥmed IV against Poland, and in particular the fortress of Kamenets, in 1083/1672. Thus in this period of apparent dearth of Persian historical writing in the late seventeenth century we have a throw back to the historiographical traditions of the later fifteenth century, when such verse epics on historical themes in Persian enjoyed a certain vogue at the courts of Meḥmed the Conqueror and Bāyezīd II.[77] I will offer a fuller analysis of this intriguing text elsewhere, but

70 Aydüz 1997, 170; Hagen 2003.
71 Gürbüzel 2023, 156–9.
72 Yeñişehirli ʿAvnī Bey 2005.
73 Drkić 2021.
74 *ibid*.; Karateke 1995, 70.
75 Cairo, Dār al-Kutub, Tārīkh Fārsī Ṭalʿat 22.
76 On these see Yıldız 2012.
77 Yıldız 2012, 440–61.

its very existence goes to prove that in fact the tradition of Persian Ottoman historiography had a greater longevity than has hitherto been expected. Moreover the manuscript, dealing with eastern Europe and now preserved in Cairo, illustrates the empire-wide reach of Persian.

My second example is an even later text, composed in 1244/1828 by order of the Ottoman qadi of Mecca and Medina, entitled the *Siyāḥatnāma-i Hind va Turkistān*. The qadi, Meḥmed ʿĀrif Beg, ordered a certain north Indian by the name of Muḥammad Khalīl b. Muḥammad to make this description of the countries he had travelled to in South and Central Asia.[78] There is nothing especially exciting about the contents of this work, which is almost entirely derivative from earlier histories and contains very little personal observation. What is intriguing, however, that in early nineteenth century Hijaz we see Persian continuing to play this role as an international lingua franca, and for textual composition within the Ottoman empire. The existence of such a text may suggest that both the duration and the geographical spread of Persian textual production in the Ottoman empire has been underestimated. Indeed, the role of Persian in the Hijaz, a multilingual environment with its pilgrims from Iran, India and Central Asia, deserves further investigation.

The two manuscripts discussed briefly above may be aberrations, but they may also indicate that Persian had a greater chronological and geographical spread in the Ottoman lands than is currently realized. Such an impression is confirmed by the report of the Ottoman bureaucrat and litterateur ʿAlī Emīrī of his visit to İşkodra (modern Shkodër, northern Albania), where he was posted on official business in 1314/1896. He remarked that 'some of the members of the ulama of İşkodra who came to visit us spoke Arabic. As this surprised me greatly I asked them how they had learned and they said, 'apart from Turkish, we know and speak both Arabic and Persian, our grandfathers did so too. Indeed, some of them started to speak very fluent Persian.'[79] ʿAlī Emīrī was amazed to discover a vibrant Turkish literary scene in northern Albania, completely unrecorded in the *teẕkires* with which he was familiar, and devoted a work to recording details of the poets of the region who were otherwise unknown. Although ʿAlī Emīrī concentrates on Turkish verse, he occasionally quotes samples of Persian verse composed by local authors. Thus, he tells us of İşkodralı Āṣaf Meḥmed Paşa (c. 1172–1222/1758 or 1759–1807/8) who composed more in Persian than Turkish, and had a great library containing classics such as ʿUrfī, Saʿdī, and Khāqānī as well as the Indian poet Fayẓī.[80] The Mevlevi poet Çaker of İşkodra (d. 1274/1857–1858) composed in both Turkish and Persian,[81] while Ḥalīmī of Tirana (d. 1204/1789–1790) wrote in Arabic, Persian and Turkish, and ʿAlī Emīrī quotes a Persian poem of his in praise of the Qadiri Sufi order to which Ḥalīmī belonged.[82]

78 Istanbul University Library, MS FY 875.
79 Karateke 1995, 70.
80 *ibid*., 90.
81 *ibid*., 108.
82 *ibid*., 130; 132.

Ḥādım of Tirana (d. 1220/1805–1806) was another Qadiri poet who wrote in both Persian and Turkish.[83]

ʿAlī Emīrī's evidence thus suggest a vibrant regional Persian literary culture that survived in Albania until the late nineteenth century at least, even if it was overshadowed by that in Turkish. Yet scarcely a trace of either literature exists in standard bio-bibliographical works. In the case of Albania, doubtless much manuscript evidence has been destroyed over the upheavals of the twentieth century, but the point remains that provinces of the Ottoman empire may have had distinct regional literary traditions of which we are hardly aware, including in Persian. Key to coming to a more accurate and nuanced picture of the place of Persian within the multilingual complex of the Ottoman empire is manuscript research, which needs to, as far as possible, embrace not just the great libraries of Istanbul, undoubted though it is that they contain hidden riches, but also provincial libraries, and even libraries in the Balkans and the Arab provinces where, as my examples above suggest, there was evidently also some market for Persian texts at least among specific elites. Although the study of Riyāḥī represents an excellent starting point for research, new manuscript discoveries already supersede some of his conclusions, while a more nuanced approach also needs to take account of the broader complex of Persianate literary practices, including translations, in the Ottoman lands.

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