Hasan Çolak

TOBB University of Economics and Technology & Romanian Academy[1]
hasanxcolak@gmail.com

Multilingualism as a Form of Transcultural Expertise: A Study of Multilingual Ottoman Muslim Intellectuals in the Eighteenth Century[2]

Abstract

The Ottoman Empire is often presented as a space in which a myriad of people using different languages coexisted. However, scholars have often taken multilingualism in the Ottoman world for granted and, despite some valuable exceptions, they have rarely ventured to study it. Likewise, they have often focused on the multiplicity of the languages spoken in the Ottoman Empire rather than the people who spoke, wrote, and interacted with each other in these languages. This paper proposes to analyse how multilingual Ottoman translators defined their expertise by virtue of their knowledge of languages that their audiences did not necessarily know. As a case study, it focuses on a joint translation of Aristotle through Ioannis Kottounios' commentary by a Greek-speaking Muslim and a Turkish-speaking Orthodox Christian in the eighteenth century. Drawing on the oft-cited metaphor of the tower of Babel, the essay engages with a discussion of transculturality in the Ottoman world of translation as expertise. Next, it explores how, if at all, these translators staged their expertise. It then analyses how their performing and staging of expertise was received by their primary audiences. Finally, it contextualises this collaboration among the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Muslim intellectuals who used sources written in Greek and Latin but produced works on ancient Greek history, philosophy and science in what the Ottomans called the *elsine-i selâse*, 'the three languages,' consisting of Turkish, Arabic and Persian.

Keywords: expertise, multilingualism, Ottoman culture, intellectual history, transculturality

> I live in a place, that very well represents the tower of Babel: in Pera they speak Turkish, Greek, Hebrew, Armenian, Arabic, Persian, Russian, Sclavonian, Wallachian, German, Dutch, French, English, Italian, Hungarian; and what is worse, there are ten of these languages spoken in my family. My grooms are Arabs; my footmen French, English, and Germans; my nurse an Armenian; my housemaids Russians; half a dozen other servants, Greeks; my steward an Italian, my janizaries Turks, so that I live in the perpetual hearing of this medley of sounds, which produces a very extraordinary effect upon the people that are born here; for they learn all these lan-

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> guages at the same time, and without knowing any of them well enough to write or read in it. There are very few men, women, or even children here, that have not the same compass of words in five or six of them. I know, myself, several infants of three or four years old, that speak Italian, French, Greek, Turkish, and Russian, which last they learn of their nurses, who are generally of that country.[3]

Quoted from the famous *Turkish Letters* by the sharp observer of the eighteenth-century Ottoman Empire Lady Montagu, this passage offers several observations about multilingualism in the Ottoman Empire. First, perhaps in an exaggerated manner, it refers to the multiplicity of languages that she hears on a daily basis in her house in Pera across Istanbul *intra muros*. Second, she makes the effort to focus on the people who spoke these languages and she clusters them on the basis of their ethno-religious affiliation and occupation. Third, she draws attention to the multiplicity of languages spoken by 'the people that are born [t]here' with different levels of competence. These observations represent intercultural, multicultural and transcultural conceptions of Ottoman culture. As Welsch maintains, in the intercultural conception of culture, people in somewhat homogenous spaces establish contacts with each other, which might be seen from the presence of several Europeans and Ottomans in Lady Montagu's house. In the multicultural conception of culture, different cultures live alongside each other with little interaction in the same space, which might be seen in the way Lady Montagu feels the need to differentiate by associating certain ethno-linguistic skills with certain groups.

While it is not unusual to come across the representation of these conceptions in the scholarship, in Lady Montagu's account there is also a transcultural interaction between the speakers of these languages who come from similar and different spaces, cultures and professions, an image that is often lacking in the current scholarship.[4] I believe that transculturality, which Welsch characterises by external networks, internal differentiation and hybridity,[5] offers an analytical grid to comprehend the highly complicated picture of multilingualism and multilingual scholars in a way that is both similar to but also beyond Lady Montagu's portrayal. While the term 'transcultural' encompasses a wide range of meanings depending on the context in which it is used[6] and is well-known for referring to cultural phenomena common across different societies[7] – thus, far surpassing the framework put forth by Welsch – the internal differences in Welsch's concept of transculturality are relatively less explored. This paper puts forward the idea that it was, in fact, the internal differences within Ottoman Muslim and Orthodox cultures that united the two translators linguistically and led to their cooperation on

3 Lady Montagu 1799, 229–30.

4 For significant exceptions, see Dursteler 2012; Gürbüzel and Shafir 2022; Kim and Bashkin 2021; Shafir 2021.

5 Welsch 2017, 2001, and 1999.

6 For a few representative examples, see Abu-Er-Rub et al. 2019; Benessaieh 2010; Herren, Rüesch and Sibille 2012; Zhang 2017.

7 For a discussion on how the term transculturality is confused with that of transculturation, see Benessaieh 2010, 16–8.

the same project. Yet, this paper does not claim that these differences automatically eliminated all distinctions between communities. On the contrary, it demonstrates that the two individuals targeted different audiences in an almost exclusive manner, which ultimately allowed them to showcase their understanding of expertise in a distinct way. This essay offers an analysis of a case study of collaborative translation by two Ottoman intellectuals, one Muslim and the other Orthodox Christian. In doing this, the aim will be to seek the traces of perception and reception of expertise from a transcultural perspective. As such, it will also revisit the intercultural and multicultural aspects of multilingual Ottomans that characterise the current scholarship in an almost exclusive fashion. The case study is based on Esad Efendi from Ioannina, an eighteenth-century Ottoman Muslim multilingual intellectual who wrote several works in Turkish, Arabic, and Persian, and who also knew Greek.[8] Esad Efendi was a renowned polymath and polyglot scholar and one of the most prominent Muslim physicists and astronomers of his time, the librarian of the Ottoman court, and one of the four copy editors at the Müteferrika press. He is reputed to have produced translations in Arabic of the two seventeenth-century Latin commentaries on Aristotle's works on physics and logic by Ioannis Kottounios. What makes his case particularly appealing is that in preparing these works, Esad Efendi was assisted by a Turkophone Orthodox Christian, whom he acknowledged in a quite laudatory way, albeit keeping his name unpronounced. Therefore, it is possible to use their collaboration as a conduit in exploring the nature of expertise as a collective multilingual endeavour. While we can follow how Esad Efendi explained his expertise (without using the term itself) in his works, his Orthodox assistant not only revealed his identity, which I analyse in a prospective article, but also bombarded the Ottoman administration with several requests in return for 'his services for the translation of the books of Aristotle and Kottounios.'

The complex nature of the collaborative work of translation between these Muslim and Orthodox translators also calls for several questions about the nature of multilingualism and multilingual people themselves in the Ottoman Empire beyond Montagu's observations. For instance, can we define multilingual translation as a particular form of expertise in a society characterised by such a degree of multilingualism and analyse the multilingual translators as experts? To put it differently, what, if anything, differentiated someone in Montagu's house from one who staged or was acknowledged as an expert due to his/her knowledge of at least two languages? Were they, for instance, expected to be educated, or was their own claim or image enough? Were there early modern criteria that one expected of a multilingual expert when their expertise was sought? How can expertise be a collective enterprise given that multilingual Ottomans were depicted by Montagu as not 'knowing any of [a foreign language] well enough to write or read in it'? Were there social, religious or ethnic concerns in the perception of their expertise, or did their authority regarding the subject of the text translated take precedence over their expertise on linguistic intricacies? Attempting to answer these

8 Küçük 2013; Küçük 2020, 177–82; Morel 2021–2022; Özervarlı, Şenel and Kuşlu 2024; Sarıkavak 1997.

questions entails historicising the connotations of expertise, if not the term itself, as staged by the experts and as acknowledged by their audience(s), in some cases even to the present day. As such, it would also be possible to see the interconnection among the early modern and modern intellectuals who began to tell these stories as stories of individual, and, as this paper will also illustrate, improbable linguistic expertise.

This paper consists of the following sections: First, it offers a discussion of the current scholarship's contentions on the nature of multilingualism in the Ottoman Empire that dismiss the interactive aspects of multilingualism in Ottoman culture, and hence the Ottoman culture of expertise. Second, by using accounts of the Muslim and Orthodox translators, it explores what 'expertise' might have meant for them, with a discussion on what 'translation' and 'composition' represented in terms of expertise within the eighteenth-century Ottoman context. Third, it searches for the representation of their 'expertise' among the Muslim and Orthodox intellectuals of the time. Finally, it offers a contextualisation of Esad Efendi's works against the background of similar enterprises by questioning how different or similar Esad Efendi's conception of expertise in producing his translations was in comparison to similar works in the eighteenth century and beyond.

1. Tower of Babel

Lady Montagu is not the only person to refer to the transcultural aspects of multilingualism and liken the Ottoman Empire to the tower of Babel, just as this paper is not the first one to quote her in that regard.[9] However, before attempting to analyse the multilingual interactions between speakers of different languages that Lady Montagu noted, one has to delve into the complex nature of the relationships between speakers of the same language. Few sources express such complexity in one's relationship with the language that the modernity will seek to standardise as 'mother tongue' as Dimitrios Vyzantios' theatre play, entitled *Babel* and originally published in 1836.[10] This work depicts a group of 'Greeks' from Chios, Crete, Albania, Istanbul, Ionia, Cyprus, and Anatolia, hence, many of them coming from the nominal Ottoman space. Despite coming together to celebrate the news of Greece's independence, each one speaks with a different form of Greek and observes different cultural codes. For instance, while smoking a shisha, the character from Kayseri uses the word *tsibouki* (Turkish: *çubuk*), whereas the character 'wiseman' uses the compound word *kapnosiringa* (*kapno*= smoke/tobacco and *siringa* (=reed)) derived from Ancient Greek, and only joins the dance reluctantly and with embarrassment. At one point, the character from Kayseri asks the wiseman why he does not speak his father's language, to which the wiseman responds in Ancient Greek by saying that one must speak the language of their ancestors. While the Cretan uses the Italian-origin word *mandata* for news, the character from Kayseri prefers the word *havantisia* (derived from the Turkish word *havadis*). At a restaurant

9 See, for instance, Dursteler 2022, 30–1.
10 Vyzantios 1996.

they visit, the character from Kayseri, misinterpreting the first words on the menu written in archaic Greek as French, hands the menu to the wiseman, who skilfully reads out the first words, but when it comes to words like *keftedes* (Turkish: *köfte*, i.e. meatballs) and *dolmades* (Turkish: *dolma*, i.e. stuffed grape leaves), he hands the menu to someone else, crying in ancient Greek that it is written in Turkish. While celebrating together, when the Cretan asks the Albanian if the latter ate *kouradia* during his visit to Crete, the Albanian, who is already depicted as a rough man, pulls out his pistol and shoots the Cretan because in Cretan Greek, the word in question refers to lamb meat, but elsewhere, this word means excrement. The sergeant who emerges to address the incident speaks half Greek and half Italian and, since he only partially understands what the witnesses say, he puts all of them in jail and even insults the character from Kayseri by calling him *giaourtovaptismenos* (baptised in yogurt, in reference to the abundance of yogurt that the Greeks from Asia Minor use in their cuisine). Amusing as they sound, these characters in Vyzantios' *Babel* represent at least one aspect of transculturality: that is, networks with external cultures, internal differentiation and hybridity.

Yet, modern scholarship appears to have been more selective in understanding the nature of multilingualism in the Ottoman Empire. Bernard Lewis' paper entitled 'From Babel to Dragomans' presented for and published by the British Academy in 1998 epitomises this selective approach.[11] In a similar line of thought to Lady Montagu's, Lewis likens the Ottoman Empire to Babel, in which many languages were spoken. However, when it comes to the people who spoke these languages, he chooses to attribute the expertise associated with multilingualism only to non-Muslims.[12] In fact, in his essay, the term Muslim takes place in two main contexts; first, when Lewis discusses the Muslim resistance towards translation in general and the translation of the Quran in particular, which he contrasts with the Jews and Christians who were quite open to translating their holy scriptures and to translation on the whole, and second, when he talks about the dragomans who converted from Christianity to Islam and hence introduced their linguistic skills to the service of the Ottoman state.[13] In another essay, entitled 'The use by Muslim historians of non-Muslim sources,' Lewis equates the term non-Muslim with the Europeans only.[14]

A quick glance at the secondary literature shows the unquestioned ramifications of the kind of perspective that Lewis so bluntly proposed. The current literature, both Ottomanist and otherwise, is mostly based on an interest in multilingualism in the Ottoman Empire rather than in the multilingual individuals themselves,[15] and the more limited literature on multilingual individuals is overwhelmingly focused on the

11 This essay was republished alongside several essays of little relevance by Lewis in a book and constituted the bulk of the title of the book: *From Babel to Dragomans: Interpreting the Middle East*. Lewis 2005.

12 Lewis 1999.

13 *ibid*.

14 Lewis 1962.

15 Balım 2000; Eruz 2010; İpşirli 1987; Kaya 1991 (English translation: Kaya 1992); Kayaoğlu 1998; Koç 2004; Meral 2013; Ülken 1935.

European dragomans living in the Ottoman Empire.[16] What makes this a particularly curious case is that we see very little difference among the works of Ottomanist and non-Ottomanist scholars who are well versed in the themes in question. Christine Woodhead's essay on 'Ottoman languages,' for example, contains not a single word on multilingual Muslims who are not converts from other faiths, while the essay is full of references to 'bilingual intermediaries, drawn both from the subject populations and from among government officials.'[17] While the former in Woodhead's account is exemplified by 'Turkish-speaking local Greek Christians,' the latter turn out to be the members of the *devşirme* practice in which Christian children who were converted into Islam and taught Turkish formed the backbone of the Ottoman ruling elite for several centuries.[18] Similarly, the recent works of Peter Burke, possibly the most influential and comprehensive studies of multilingualism and translation across the world, are indicative of this state of the literature as we can perceive from his references to the Ottoman Empire: his Ottoman translators, too, are often 'converts from Christianity to Islam.'[19]

Even if the case study in this essay involves an Ottoman Muslim translator, the aim is not to counter the arguments and convictions of the current scholarship about the alleged absence of Muslims' roles as experts on translation. On the contrary, the aim is to draw attention to the complicated nature of the multilingual Ottomans' relationship with the languages that they knew, which was complicated even further when they combined their expertise for a collaborative enterprise.

2. Self-perception of Expertise

To return to the joint enterprise of translation, how can we determine the key expert in the translations of Aristotle into Arabic through the Latin commentaries of Kottounios? In his prologue to the Logic,[20] Esad Efendi claims that he was not happy with the earlier translations of Aristotle that were made during the Abbasid caliphate. To be precise, he accused them of not conforming to the original Greek: 'most translations dating back to the time of the Abbasid kings were confused and at odds with the original Greek books…'[21] Here, even though he did not use the term, he claimed a certain expertise on Aristotelian works, and he compared himself to the earlier translators of these works. Obviously, he made the subtle claim that this was not only a new translation, but also an independent work in which he showcased a technique of performing a certain form of expertise. This is something that the modern scholarship has taken up to claim that what Esad Efendi was doing was beyond mere translation. In his

16 In an exceptional way, in her study on the dragomans, Rothman underscores the 'role of individuals of Ottoman or North African descent in Orientalist scholarly production' in Europe in different capacities (Rothman 2021, 14).
17 Woodhead 2011, 149.
18 *ibid*.
19 Burke 2007, 14.
20 The said prologue is analysed, edited and translated into English in Morel 2021–2022.
21 Morel 2021–2022, 344; Şenel 2024, 382.

work on Physics, Esad Efendi claimed that he himself did the translation: 'I wanted to translate the *al-Kutub al-Samâniya li'l-Samâ' al-tabî'î* which is finer than his other books and is esteemed among to all of the Arab, Greek, Persian and Latin wisemen.'[22] While presenting his knowledge of the Greek language as an asset, his perceptions of his own expertise appear somewhat confusing. In the same work, he also emphasised that he made his translation and commentary 'within the commentary of the excellent Ioannis Kottounios the Greek from Karaferye,' modern-day Veroia in Greece), which was written in Latin.[23] So, the questions of whether he knew not only Greek but also Latin and what his level of expertise in these languages was remain at the heart of the discussion here, which has been noted only in passing in a few recent works.[24] Before we move on to these questions, we can consider Esad Efendi's partial answer in translation of Porphyry's *Isagoge*. Here, Esad Efendi claimed that he has done this translation directly from Latin: 'I translated it from the tongue of the Latins.'[25] However, he also noted that there was a Greek intellectual who helped him: 'I then spent some time studying their utterances and understanding their literal, commonly known, and technical meanings, thanks to one of the Greek servants of the Sublime Empire, who knew philosophy based on verification and certitude and not on mere opinion and surmise.'[26]

Who, then, was the expert here? Was it Esad Efendi, who composed the final work and who allegedly knew Greek and Latin, at least to a certain extent, but received some practical or technical help with the correct meaning of certain concepts? Or was it the Orthodox translator who helped Esad Efendi with his expert knowledge on the gist of the matter? To my understanding, their individual perceptions differ, if not explicitly clash. On the one hand, Esad Efendi appears to have taken credit for the entire work even though he acknowledged the highly-regarded contributions of an anonymous Orthodox translator. The scholarship had long proved unable to explain the difference between the commentary by Kottounios and the work of Esad Efendi. Some scholars maintained that Esad Efendi's main contribution lies in his knowledge of the Muslim commentators on Aristotle, which was lacking in the work of Kottounios,[27] and supposedly also in the work of his Orthodox translator. Hence, the final work was beyond mere translation. Rather, it was the composition of an independent work (*te'lîf*). There are certain grounds for this claim. As a recent contribution presenting the preliminary conclusions of a research project reminds us through the case of Esad Efendi's oeuvre, demarcation of the line between composition and translation was much wider than it has come to be understood in the modern period.[28] The plethora of words in the Ottoman literary culture to refer to ways of engaging with a text are testimony to

22 Süleymaniye Yazma Eserler Kütüphanesi, Istanbul, Ragıp Paşa Collection 824, fol. 1v.
23 *ibid*.
24 Artan 2016, 114; Baga 2023, 203.
25 Morel 2021–2022, 354; Şenel 2024, 382.
26 Morel 2021–2022, 345; Şenel 2024, 383.
27 Kaya 1991; Sarıkavak 1997.
28 Şenel 2024.

this phenomenon.[29] Yet, more recent analyses of Esad Efendi's texts on physics and logic underscore their translational qualities. Küçük claims that Esad Efendi's work on physics is 'a fairly literal translation of Cottunius [Kottounios], not an interpretive rendition of Aristotle,'[30] and Morel refers to Esad Efendi's work on physics and logic as 'paraphrastic translations.'[31] However, regardless of the debates on the 'original' contribution of the translator/commentator or on the genre in which they wrote, as this essay will demonstrate, there were several other Ottoman scholars who cited the people who helped them with their translations, which was not the case with Esad Efendi.

On the other hand, as Kaya demonstrates in the most detailed survey to date, the Orthodox translator asked for and received a number of privileges from the Ottoman court for his translation work on a continuous basis, although the translator is not identified.[32] As I analyse in a forthcoming piece, this translator was called Nikolaos Kritias. He was one of the most knowledgeable people on Aristotle at the time and later on, he held several prestigious posts in the lay and ecclesiastical offices of the Orthodox community in the Ottoman Empire. A native of Bursa, he came from a Turkish-speaking family, and he knew both Greek and Latin. He served in the Patriarchal Academy as one of three grammar teachers, as secretary of the Holy Synod of the Patriarchate of Constantinople, as grand logothete in the same Patriarchate, as grand ecclesiarch, as the chief warden (*kapu kahyâsı*) of the Phanariot prince of Moldavia, as scholarch of the Patriarchal Academy and as chief secretary of the patriarchal court.[33] In his petition to the Ottoman court, he presented himself as the person who 'served in the translation of the books of the first teacher and the chief of the philosophers, Aristotle, and of his commentator, Kottounios.'[34] Much like his counterpart, Kritias did not mention that he had helped Esad Efendi in this translation. The fact that neither Esad Efendi nor Kritias acknowledged each other's names brings me to the reception of their expertise in the Ottoman world of letters.

3. Reception of Expertise

Both Esad Efendi and Kritias were known as experts on matters Greek and Turkish, respectively, and this expertise appears to have relied on their knowledge of languages. Some eighteenth-century compilations on the Ottoman poets mention Esad Efendi's knowledge of languages beyond the *elsine-i selâse*. Esad Mehmed Efendi, for instance, refers to Esad Efendi of Ioannina as 'the translator of the Latin books of philosophy

29 Demircioğlu 2016; Paker 2014. For a thought-provoking discussion by three scholars, see Gürbüzel, Sooyang and Miller 2022.
30 Küçük 2013, 134.
31 Morel 2021–22, 331.
32 Kaya 2024.
33 Skouvaras 1961, 55, Gritsopoulos 1966, vol. I, 351–62, Angelomati-Tsougaraki 1984, 301–3.
34 T.C. Cumhurbaşkanlığı Devlet Arşivleri (Osmanlı Arşivi), Istanbul Mühimme Defterleri 132/91.

and the narrator of Greek works.'[35] Likewise, Râmiz states that he translated Şâhidî's famous Persian-Turkish rhymed dictionary into Greek and dispatched it to his native Ioannina, and as a result, people there began to show interest in the Persian language.[36] This translation, if it ever existed, has not survived. Kritias' association with the Turkish language is no different, but with more obvious reasons. He is known for his translation of the *berat*, the document of appointment issued in 1754 for patriarch Kyrillos Karakallos of Constantinople, from Turkish to Greek.[37] In addition, one of Kritias' contemporaries, Iosipos Moisiodax noted in his *Apologia* that Nikolaos Kritias was translating Theofylos Korydalleus' work on logic into 'the language of the rulers.'[38] Just as is the case with the reference to Esad Efendi's translation of Şâhidî's work from Persian to Greek, we do not know if this translation still exists.

Relying on these contemporary accounts written by people who did not have knowledge of the relevant languages, the modern scholarship took their claims for granted. One of the earliest scholarly analyses on Esad Efendi was tellingly entitled 'The richest inheritor of the Greek philosophers among us' (*Yunan Feylesoflarının Bizde En Zengin Varisi yahut Yanyalı Esad Efendi*).[39] Likewise, starting with the pioneering work of Adnan Adıvar on Ottoman science, Esad Efendi's knowledge of both Greek and Latin has been taken for granted.[40] Some people[41] even claimed that Esad Efendi also received an education in the flourishing Greek schools in Ioannina.[42] In a similar fashion, several modern analyses on Kritias claimed that he knew not only Turkish, but also Arabic.[43] In my opinion, we have few insights into Esad Efendi's knowledge of Latin and Kritias' knowledge of Arabic outside their own claims or claims of their contemporaries who did not necessarily know these languages. From the expertise perspective, both Esad Efendi and Kritias appear to have posed successfully as experts in these fields, an image that the modern scholarship often took for granted without much questioning.

Because we do not currently have any work that we can attribute to Esad Efendi and Kritias in Latin and Arabic, respectively, it is simply impossible to comment on their knowledge of these languages. While Esad Efendi and Kritias knew both Turkish and Greek and probably conversed in these languages, the way they wrote in these languages reminds us of the passage quoted at the beginning of this essay. Multilingualism did not necessarily mean that the multilingual scholars had expert knowledge of these languages as the scholarship tends to affirm. In corresponding with the patriarch of Jerusalem Chrysanthos Notaras, Esad Efendi often used the medium of Greek

35 Esad Mehmed Efendi 2018, 44.
36 Râmiz 1994, 9.
37 *Library of the Parliament of Greece, Athens*, MS 66, fol. 217–22; Gedeon 1910, 76–86.
38 Iosipos Moisiodax 1976, 37.
39 Şerefeddin [Yaltkaya] 1910.
40 Abdulhak Adnan [Adıvar] 1939, 126–7.
41 Sarıkavak 1997.
42 For the significance of Ioannina for the Greek-speaking Muslims, see Kotzageorgis 2009; Kotzageorgis 1997, 77–87.
43 Skouvaras 1961, 91.

language, but in doing this, he benefitted from the help of three members of the lay and ecclesiastical bureaucracy of the Orthodox community, namely Iakovos Manos, Drakos Soutsos and an unidentified person.[44] The only instance in which he himself wrote in Greek is contained in a few lines at the end of one of his letters, probably as a gesture.[45] As noted by Pinelopi Stathi, who edited this letter, there is no orthography and the spelling is problematic, to say the least.[46] From the way the ink dripped, it is also possible to note that he had difficulty with writing in Greek. So, we can disprove at least the claim that he received a form of education in Greek schools in Ioannina. On the back of another letter, he wrote in Turkish, clearly with no difficulty.[47] Even though more research is needed on the topic, a comparison of this unpublished letter with Esad Efendi's manuscripts[48] suggests that the two appear to be written by the same hand. The only extant petition written by Kritias gives an idea of the limits of his knowledge of formal Turkish, at least in the 1720s. If we assume that he wrote the petition on his own, we might say that he shows clear signs of poor selection of words when, attempting to refer to 'former times' (which would have been expressed with the phrase *evvelden* or *kadîmden olageldiği üzere*), he used the expression 'as it has happened in the predecessors' (*selefde olageldiği üzere*).[49]

Ironically, however, thanks to the success of these two scholars in connecting the Muslim and Orthodox worlds and staging themselves as experts on the affairs of the other community within their own communities, both the Ottomanist and Hellenist scholarship have ignored the transcultural collaboration between the two translators. The limits of their knowledge in the languages they are famous for using to make a difference in their religious communities call for the question of how representative their collaboration was in the broader Ottoman context.

4. Contextualisation

Was the 'expertise' of these translators exceptional in the ways in which they are presented in the secondary literature, often for reasons that are not entirely correct? The answer to this question is affirmative based on the recent scholarship on scholars of the Ottoman world of letters who were non-convert Ottoman Muslims as translators or commentators of texts in languages beyond Turkish, Arabic and Persian.

44 Stathi 1986.
45 *National Library of Greece, Athens*, Metochio tou Panagiou Tafou, Allilografia ton Diermineon 94, fol. 154.
46 Stathi 1986, 64.
47 *National Library of Greece, Athens*, Metochio tou Panagiou Tafou, Allilografia ton Diermineon 94, fol. 218.
48 Süleymaniye Yazma Eserler Kütüphanesi, Istanbul, Ragıp Paşa Collection 824.
49 T.C. Cumhurbaşkanlığı Devlet Arşivleri (Osmanlı Arşivi), Istanbul, Hatt-ı Hümâyûn 1165/38.

A significant example is the seventeenth-century intellectual Katib Çelebi's *Cihannümâ*. In a manner similar to Esad Efendi, Katib Çelebi dwelled on his own ability to perform expertise and explained his interest in writing this book as follows:

> … because it was clear that Islamic books were all inaccurate with respect to the countries of Europe and that Muslim writers fell short in describing most of the climes and countries, I have translated the abridgment of the book of *Atlas* (i.e., Atlas Minor of Hondius) which is the most recent of the geographical works written in Latin, and supplemented it with some useful information from the Islamic books.[50]

As he also notes in this work, Katib Çelebi benefited from the help of Mehmed İhlâsî, a Frenchman who converted to Islam and lived most of his life in the Ottoman Empire. İbrahim Müteferrika cites Mehmed İhlâsî among Katib Çelebi's chief sources of help and presents the former as 'a very capable man, familiar with the principles of geography and with an excellent knowledge of Latin' and as someone who 'mastered Turkish in a short time.'[51] Katib Çelebi also explains the way he translated the book as follows: 'I had him read the book and expound it to me, and we reflected on its meaning, considering how best to convey the author's intention.'[52] As Gottfried Hagen illustrates, there are several cases in which Mehmed İhlâsî's French pronunciation in reading the text in Latin influenced the way Katib Çelebi spelled certain words: *Ejipsiler* for Egyptians or *Gresiler* for Greeks.[53] Hagen also refers to several cases in which Katib Çelebi used different spellings for relevant vocabulary. As proof of Katib Çelebi's heavy reliance on Mehmed İhlâsî for the translation, Hagen also states that Katib Çelebi confused *aurea*, the Latin word for gold, with *Avrupa*, the Turkish word for Europe.[54] Hence, disagreeing with the earlier scholarship, he concluded that Katib Çelebi barely knew Latin and relied heavily on the assistance of Mehmed İhlâsî. We could also see a similar case with Katib Çelebi's work on the History of Constantinople and Caesars. Here, too, the way he spelled the names of Byzantine Emperors and his lack of consistency in spelling suggest that he relied on a Francophone translator. For instance, the Byzantine emperor *Nikiforos* appears as *Niseforos* or *Nisoforos*.[55] Several Ottoman intellectuals, including Katib Çelebi, also spelled the name of Alexander the Great's father as Filikos. However, a copy of Esad Efendi's work on physics, catalogued as the author's copy, conforms to the Greek original and spells it clearly as 'Filipos.'[56] This contrasts with several other copies of the same work by copyists who produced more beautiful and legible manuscripts: They simply spell the name as 'Filikos.'[57] A

50 Kātib Çelebi 2021, 35–6.
51 Hagen 2015, 298.
52 *ibid*., 299.
53 *ibid*.
54 *ibid*., 297.
55 Kâtib Çelebi 2009, 13, 18, 21, 31.
56 Süleymaniye Yazma Eserler Kütüphanesi, Istanbul, Ragıp Paşa Collection 824, fol. 1v.
57 Süleymaniye Yazma Eserler Kütüphanesi, Istanbul, Hacı Beşir Ağa Collection 414, fol. 1v.

recent study also shows that Esad paid minute attention to transliterating the names of ancient Greek philosophers, hence differing from the earlier scholarship on Aristotle in Arabic, in particular the ninth-century translator Hunayn ibn Ishak.[58]

The seventeenth-century Ottoman intellectual Hezarfen Hüseyin is also reputed to have had knowledge of Latin and Greek. Even though he does not mention his main sources, one of the sources in question was Georgios Kedrinos' *Synopsis Historion*.[59] Hezarfen Hüseyin notes that it was Panagiotis Nikousios, the chief interpreter of the Ottoman imperial chancery, who supplied him with the relevant books and that these books were translated for him by Ali Ufkî Bey, the famous Polish convert from Christianity to Islam.[60] Just like Katib Çelebi and unlike Esad Efendi, Hezarfen Hüseyin acknowledges the person who translated the work for him. However, he does not mention how the translation and composition of the work were realised; Hezarfen Hüseyin's work still awaits further investigation in that regard. So, despite the confident assertions of the scholarship, we are still unsure about his level of competence in these languages.

A similar translation was done in the eighteenth century by a less significant and little-known individual, namely Mahmud Efendi, the *mufti* of Athens. His History of the City of Philosophers, as published and extensively studied by Gülçin Tunalı,[61] offers several insights for a comparative study. Unlike Esad Efendi, Katib Çelebi and Hüseyin Hezarfen, he was quite open in explaining how his work came into existence. First of all, he acknowledged the people who translated the text for him: 'the clergymen called Papa Kolari and Papa Sotiri who are the chiefs of the priests and monks of the four hundred churches and ten monasteries still present in the lands of Athens.'[62] He also praised them as being 'much occupied with the history of Athens in histories in the Frankish, Greek, Latin and Roman languages' and having 'complete knowledge and skill.'[63] These words of praise remind us of the way Esad Efendi praised the person who helped him, but let us remember that Esad Efendi did not acknowledge that person's name. Just like some of the people mentioned throughout this essay, Mahmud Efendi did not know the source language, at least to the degree to understand the Greek translators who did not know Turkish. Therefore, he clearly expressed the difficulty he experienced and stated that he 'needed another translator to [understand] their Greek language.'[64]

Just as the other examples, he mentioned in several cases that he translated and composed this text. In doing this, he did not differ from the others in using the terms translation and composition (*tercüme* and *te'lîf*) interchangeably. However, he departed from them in one way, namely his conception of professional expertise. In the intro-

58 Şenel 2024, 394.
59 Bekar 2011, 46.
60 *ibid*., 45.
61 Tunalı 2020 and 2012.
62 Tunalı 2020, 86–7.
63 *ibid*., 87.
64 Tunalı 2020, 89.

duction, he claimed that his profession (*meslek*) concerned giving legal opinions and sermons, that his time was occupied with jurisprudence (*fikh*), *hadith*, and *tefsîr*, which constituted his knowledge. Finally, he claimed that he did not have enough time to attain mastery 'in the profession of book construction' (*kitâb inşâ mesleği*).[65] What is interesting here is that even though most of the people mentioned in this paper had somewhat limited knowledge of the source languages in their translation and composition work, the person who claimed the least expertise provides us with the most extensive information about the translators and the process of translation. Maybe the practice during the period under study of claiming expertise is one of the things that prevent the modern scholar from comprehending the true nature of multilingualism and multilingual scholars in the Ottoman Empire.

5. Conclusion

Even though the term 'expertise' did not feature in the works quoted in this essay, at least in the way we understand the concept today, claiming expertise on a certain topic or text was pretty much on the agendas of the people who composed works on the basis of the translation of works in Greek and Latin. Claiming expertise, sometimes at the expense of the other agents who helped with translating a certain text, appears to have created an image of the mastery of the composers of these works among the readers of these texts who did not have knowledge of the source languages. Modern scholarship is built on this image, drawn by those who claimed expertise and convinced their contemporary readers. When we have a closer reading of the texts and the individual writings of the translators in question, however, it appears that their knowledge in the multitude of languages on which their claim of expertise is based was somewhat limited. Let us remember the passage by Montagu on this occasion. Finally, my contextualisation of the case of Esad Efendi's claim of expertise with some other cases of translation in the Ottoman Empire might suggest that there was a negative correlation between claiming expertise and the details that the translators/composers offer about the essential support that they benefited from. Overall, shifting our focus from multilingualism to multilingual scholars with an eye to the nature of their expertise rather than their image seems to be the key for a better understanding of the transcultural world of Ottoman letters.

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65 Tunalı 2020, 88.

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