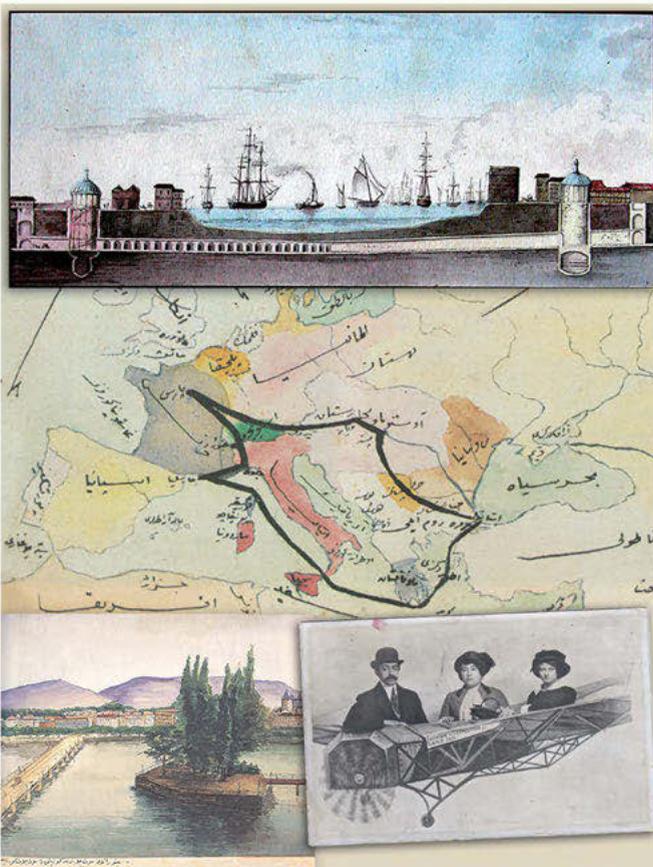


Venturing beyond borders – Reflections on genre, function and boundaries in Middle Eastern travel writing

Edited by **Bekim Agai**
Olcay Akyıldız
Caspar Hillebrand



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Table of Contents

Introduction.....	7
I. Approaching the field of travel writing – The broad picture	
<i>Irvin Cemil Schick</i>	
Self and Other, Here and There. Travel writing and the construction of identity and place	13
<i>Bâki Asiltürk</i>	
The image of Europe and Europeans in Ottoman-Turkish travel writing	29
<i>Caspar Hillebrand</i>	
Ottoman travel accounts to Europe. An overview of their historical development and a commented researchers' list.....	53
II. Writing on Self and Other – A closer look	
<i>Nazlı İpek Hüner</i>	
Travelling within the Empire. Perceptions of the East in the historical narratives on Cairo by Mustafa Âli and Evliya Çelebi	77
<i>Bekim Agai</i>	
Religion as a determining factor of the Self and the Other in travel literature. How Islamic is the Muslim worldview? Evliya Çelebi and his successors reconsidered	101
<i>Jasmin Khosravi</i>	
Iranian women on the road. The case of Şadiqe Doulatâbâdi in Europe, 1923–27.....	131
III. Drawing lines – Borders and crossings in genre	
<i>Leyla von Mende</i>	
<i>Taḥşîl rehberi</i> as a source for both the traveller and the historian	159
<i>Mehdi Sajid</i>	
Rashîd Riḍâ in Europe. A monomythic reading of his travel narrative.....	179
<i>Olca Akyıldız</i>	
Imaginary travel(s) as a discursive strategy. The case of Ahmet Mithat and Ottoman constructions of Europe.....	203

Appendix

Caspar Hillebrand

A researchers' list of Ottoman travel accounts to Europe.

Bibliographical part 227

About the authors..... 263

Introduction

This volume is the result of a workshop entitled “Travel writing between fact and fiction – genre, functions and boundaries” organized at Boğaziçi University Istanbul in December 2010 within the frame of the research project “Europe from the outside – formations of Middle Eastern views on Europe from inside Europe”, based at the University of Bonn.¹ Our aim was to provide a space within which scholars with expertise in a variety of languages and from disciplines ranging from Literary Studies to Near and Middle Eastern Studies and History could explore the complexity of travel writing as a historical, literary and cultural source for the 17th to 20th centuries. The workshop raised the questions of how to approach these narratives from different angles and in what ways they contribute to our understanding of their contexts. Although there was a strong focus on Ottoman-Turkish travelogues to Europe and to other places, we intentionally invited studies on travellers from Iran and the Arabic world in order to broaden the picture.

This book is a contribution to the academic conversation about travel writing in general and Middle Eastern travelogues particularly in two significant ways: First, it aims at crossing the paths of expertise on Middle Eastern travellers and the field of Travel Studies in order to create a basis for comparative research on Middle Eastern travelogues that reaches beyond the boundaries which Ottoman, Arabic and Iranian Studies have established both among each other and between themselves and studies on Western travel writing. Second, the papers provide a broad analytical framework thus representing various approaches to travel writing across disciplines, geographies and time. They make use of the theory and methods of Travel Studies, Gender Studies, Postcolonial Studies, Psychology and Transcultural History.

The book’s title, “Venturing beyond borders – reflections on genre, function and boundaries in Middle Eastern travel writing”, reflects these lines of thought. It challenges the reading of borders, frontiers and boundaries constructed by geography, politics, language, and gender, and examines their relevance for travelling and travel writing. This in turn also brings up questions of the contested

¹ Funded by the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF), this project focuses on travel accounts by Ottoman, Arab and Persian travellers in order to examine the changing and the enduring elements of Middle Eastern perceptions of Europe from the 19th century until the end of World War II. One focus of the project is to examine functions of mediated images of Europe and their significance for the conception of the Self. By locating this process within Europe, the project thus questions the socio-cultural boundaries of both the Middle East and Europe. For further information see the research group’s website: www.europava.uni-bonn.de.

boundaries of genre and function: Where does travel writing end and memories, geographies, and biographies start? All papers tackle aspects related to these intertwined questions in specific ways. To broaden the scope we also included research on fictitious travel reports in order to complement the reflection on factual/literary fiction, intertextuality, and narrativity in Middle Eastern travel writing. Finally, the main question this volume raises is: What can we learn from these factual and fictitious travel narratives and how do they contribute to our understanding both of the travellers and the societies they came from and travelled to?

The contributions in this volume have been divided into three parts according to their content and approach:

The first part, entitled “Approaching the field of travel writing – the broad picture”, provides a wide focus and offers an overview and introduction into the theory of travel and travel writing (İrvin Cemil Schick), the historical development of Ottoman travel writing on Europe with regard to content (Bâki Asiltürk) and with regard to numbers and genre, while also providing a list of the sources (Caspar Hillebrand). For reasons of readability, we have moved the extensive bibliographical part of Caspar Hillebrand’s contribution to the end of the book.

The second part, “Writing on Self and Other – a closer look”, focuses on theoretical and narrative issues as well, but concentrates on the representation of the Other and the Self and works with exemplary texts to give a more distinct, detail-oriented picture. Topics included in this section are Ottoman perceptions of “Oriental” Others, which are crucial in order to understand whether or not a particular perception of Europe was unique (Nazlı İpek Hüner), the role of religion in the construction of the travellers’ identity and alterity (Bekim Agai), and gender as a significant factor both in travelling and travel writing and in the encounter with Europe as in the case of a female Iranian traveller (Jasmin Khosravie).

Finally, the third and last part, “Drawing lines – borders and crossings in genre”, addresses the variability of the genre, asking about its limits and exploring connections between fact and fiction. It examines the relationships between different genres (travelogue, guide, political treatise) and the variety of sources that actually form a travel narrative (Leyla von Mende), the functions and techniques of composition, i.e. the construction of a coherent narration, its plot and fragments (Mehdi Sajid), and the interplay of the world of thoughts and dreams with reality and the connections between fact and fiction, novel and travelogue, that are significant in the textual formation (Olcay Akyıldız).

We see our workshop and its proceedings as a starting point to approach the complex variety of questions with regard to Ottoman-Turkish, Arabic and Persian travelogues in a comparative way – among each other and within the field of Travel Studies in general. We hope to inspire further research along this path, beyond the borders that exist within the academic community and along the lines of different languages.

We would like to thank the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF), the editor of the series “Istanbul Texts and Studies” Barbara Pusch and the Orient Institut Istanbul as well as our English editor Emily Coolidge Toker for their efforts and support at various stages of the publication of this book.

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Bekim Agai, Olcay Akyıldız & Caspar Hillebrand

