

Havlioğlu, Didem and Uysal, Zeynep (eds.). *Routledge Handbook of Turkish Literature*. Routledge 2023. 454 pages. ISBN (E-Book): 9780429279270.

Reviewed by **Arif Tapan**
University of Vienna, Research Fellow
arifltapan@gmail.com

Routledge Handbook of Turkish Literature, edited by Didem Havlioğlu (Duke University, USA) and Zeynep Uysal (Boğaziçi University, Türkiye), consists of eight thematically classified sections. The work, which took a long time to prepare, is dedicated to the memory of Walter G. Andrews, who passed away in 2020. In this eight-part study, there are 29 articles by 30 researchers. The question of how to include Turkish literature in the scope of what we call global/world literature and how this literature can be studied in this context is gaining increasing attention among literary researchers. Another recent example of this growing interest is *Turkish Literature as World Literature*¹ by Burcu Alkan (University of Manchester, UK) and Çimen Günay-Erkol (Özyeğin University, Türkiye) which is dedicated to Talât Sait Halman and Terry Eagleton.² Although their scope, prioritized themes, and approaches differ from one another, there is an undeniable tendency in these studies to see (or read) Turkish literature as a part of global literature.

If it is necessary to discuss ‘Turkish’ literature on the axis of global literature, we should be aware of how this literature is named in its own language. In English, pieces of literature belonging to different languages and nationalities are called by a single adjective (e.g., ‘Turkish’ or ‘French’ literature), whereas in the Turkish language, this situation finds its place in two different expressions based on language and nationality (e.g., the literature of ‘Turkish’ language or the literature of ‘Turkish’ nation). Although it is not correct to say that the adjectives describing kinds of literature in English correspond to only one agent such as language, nationality, religion, gender, geography, state, etc., we can claim that the languages in which literary texts are produced function as an inclusive umbrella for all these agents. While language (e.g., Ottoman Turkish, modern Turkish, Karamanlidika, Armeno-Turkish, Kurdish) or the locations where that language is used (e.g., the Ottoman Empire and the Republic of Türkiye) seem to have been accepted as the most inclusive element surrounding and constructing literature in these studies, they do not reduce the relationship between Turkish literature and global literature to a language-based difference only. As this emphasis suggests, I would like to focus on two sections of this voluminous work: ‘Cultures of Reading’ (Section III) and ‘Linguistic Diversity’ (Section V).

- 1 Alkan, Burcu and Günay-Erkol, Çimen (eds.). 2021. *Turkish Literature as World Literature*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing.
- 2 I think it is important to indicate to whom the studies are dedicated here because it gives us preliminary data about the methodology of the studies and how they construct their literary perspectives.

Routledge Handbook of Turkish Literature does not claim to be a ‘progressive’ (Eurocentric, or non-Eurocentric) history of Turkish literature or to mention every piece produced in Turkish literature. Although the book is associated with the issue of global/world literature by referring to David Damrosch’s concept of ‘glocal’ rather than ‘global,’ it aims to be a ‘guide’ regarding the possibilities of Turkish literature for English-language readers. This is done by considering different literary periods, languages and alphabets, literary movements, and genres in the historical continuity of Turkish literature. As such, it can be said that the study does not only emphasize the post-republican period, but rather the multicultural literary production and consumption patterns of the Ottoman Empire period as a constitutive line, and this is not because of a deliberate choice, but because the very nature of empire provides us with more examples of literary dialog and interaction between different literary traditions around the world.

In the section ‘Cultures of Reading,’ Irvin Cemil Schick reminds us of some historical evidence of the Ottoman literary culture such as the literacy rate in the 19th century or the prices of printed books and shows that we cannot simply explain literary culture in the Ottoman Empire only in parallel with the spread of the printing press. Gülşah Taşkın expands her questions around the phenomena such as translation, rewriting, competition, and patronage, which represent a distinct stage in the literary transformation of the empire over different centuries and illustrates that the practice of translation was not a simple exchange between the languages and cultures with which the empire engaged. Following the texts of five Muslim-Ottoman writers produced between 1866 and 1896, Fatih Altuğ investigates how the profiles of readers and authors in literary texts are constructed and what kind of ‘modern’ Ottoman individual is presented to the Ottoman public. In his article, Altuğ traces how ‘Ottoman authors’ conceive of authorship, and readership through fictional texts. He also provides us with a functional methodology on how researchers can analyze fictional texts to make sense of 19th-century modern Ottoman literature and the literary public, for which our concrete knowledge and materials are unfortunately still quite limited.

The section ‘Linguistic Diversity’ first deals with the literary corpus of modern Ottoman/Turkish literature in the empire, produced in different scripts other than the Arabic, Persian, and Latin alphabets, and then explores the interaction between Turkish and Kurdish literary production practices during the Republican period. In her article, Şehnaz Şişmanoğlu-Şimşek focuses on Karamanlidika, the Turkish texts written in the Greek script, produced by Turkophone Ottoman Christians, and she introduces Evangelinos Misailidis, an Ottoman Greek author, and his literary production in the empire. Accordingly, Murat Cankara analyzes the Armeno-Turkish literary texts, the Turkish texts written in the Armenian script in the empire. Focusing on three Armeno-Turkish novels produced by Ottoman Armenian authors in the mid-nineteenth century, from 1851 to 1868, he questions the establishment and reception of the novel as a new literary genre in the empire. Putting aside the widely discussed questions of the early 2000s, such as ‘What is the first Turkish novel?’ or ‘What makes a literary text ‘Turkish?’,’ the author asks thought-provoking questions about these Armeno-Turkish novels alongside the counterpart texts produced by

Muslim-Ottoman authors. Lastly, Suat Baran and Ömer Faruk Yekdeş bring to the agenda, not another alphabet used in the production of Ottoman/Turkish literature, but another language, Kurdish, which has been existed side by side with Turkish in the Ottoman Empire and modern Turkey. Based on possible interactions between Turkish and Kurdish, they trace the relationship between Turkish literature and the formation of modern Kurdish literature in Turkey.

The work consists of eight thematic sections, and there are six more sections as follows: ‘Mystical Genesis,’ ‘Ottoman Poetics,’ ‘Women and Gender,’ ‘National Identity,’ ‘Literary Modernisms,’ and ‘Political Turmoils and Traumas.’

One of the most beneficial aspects of the book is the ‘Timeline’ at the end, starting from 4000 BC to Orhan Pamuk’s Nobel Prize in Literature in 2006. All literary researchers (not only English readers) can benefit from this meticulously prepared timeline since it presents not only the history of literature but also political and cultural milestones in the world and Turkish history side by side. On the other hand, as it stands, the book does not devote much attention to Turkish literature after the 2000s, but considering the overall study, the main intention, on the contrary, is to liberate the study of Turkish literature from classical periodization. What the book tries to promote, instead, is to clarify literary texts or possible interactions within their local dynamics.

Routledge Handbook of Turkish Literature, which I consider very useful in terms of the methodological approach it presents, will, I believe, be a ‘guide’ that researchers will be keeping at their fingertips. Indeed, this study seems to enhance the study of modern Ottoman/Turkish literature and free it from certain rote discourses. Following Mehmet Fatih Uslu and Fatih Altuğ’s work published in 2014,³ and Alkan and Günay-Erkol’s work published in 2021, this book seeks to build on the efforts of its predecessors.

On the other hand, it can be concluded that this work also has some shortcomings, as is the case with every work that is a potential handbook. More precisely, the book must shoulder some burdens arising from the reception and historicization of Turkish literature up to the date. As I mentioned above, the work intends to portray Turkish literature as a part of global literature and to bring to the fore the unique aspects of Ottoman/Turkish literature that stem from its authenticity.

However, in doing so, I note that the work still cannot overcome some limits as follows: (1) In the book, which new text or author do we recognize that we have not encountered in the previous ones and that will also enrich the study of Turkish literature? Although modern Ottoman/Turkish literature has been characterized by an emphasis on multiculturalism and multilingualism since the early 2000s, I can say that this study discusses the same emphases through the same literary texts that have been studied so far both in Turkish and English. (2) Although we see that the attempt, which developed after the 2000s, to investigate the historiographies of Turkish liter-

3 Altuğ, Fatih and Uslu, Mehmet Fatih (eds.). 2014. *Tanzimat ve Edebiyat: Osmanlı İstanbulu’nda Modern Edebi Kültür*. Istanbul: İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları.

ature, persists in this book, this agenda only occupies a certain group of researchers in both Turkish and non-Turkish academia. While I don't necessarily regard this as a deficiency, I must also add that it does not fit in with the attempt to read Turkish literature in a global sense both in Turkish and English. Because, to extricate the study of Turkish literature from the framework determined by national historiographies, there is a need to negotiate with the literary approach that generates and promotes these historiographies, and this should not remain only on a one-sided and discursive level. (3) The limitation of effect in the attempt to read Turkish literature in the context of global literature is directly related to how much Turkish literature is available in the English language, where all these are discussed. In other words, while it is possible for all these efforts to find meaning through translations of Turkish literature, how many of the primary literary texts referenced in the book are available in English? For instance, how many of the Armeno-Turkish or Karamanlidika novels examined in the book are currently available in English? Even *The Story of Akabi* (1851), considered the first modern Ottoman/Turkish novel, is not yet properly available in English.⁴

Nevertheless, it is undeniable that the *Routledge Handbook of Turkish Literature* has carried Turkish literature beyond the common categorizations and receptions of the Republican period. However, the attempt to expand the current borders of Turkish literature has progressed very slowly at this point since the same literary texts have remained in the same sphere of influence for decades. Discussing Turkish literature in world literature in terms of plurality and diversity requires much more new literary text, be it translation or copyright, and effort than we have today. Unless new Ottoman/Turkish literary texts become more widely accessible for both local and global readers, all these efforts will inevitably turn the aforementioned literary texts into mere historical documents in archives.

4 *The Story of Akabi*, the first modern Ottoman-Turkish novel, was published as Armeno-Turkish in Istanbul in 1851, followed by an Armenian translation in 1953, a Turkish transiteration in 1991 in Latin letters, and finally in French in 2018. Currently, researchers are working on an English translation of the novel, as well.