Ottoman *dīvān* literature in the Turkish literary-historical canon

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Abstract: *This article revolves around the modern historiography of Ottoman literature produced between the 14th and 19th centuries. Manuscripts constitute the primary material for Ottoman literary historiography. 186,444 manuscripts are registered in Turkey alone,[1] and these manuscripts were nationalized by the Republic of Turkey through the liquidation of vakıf library collections. This vast manuscript heritage was used to construct a national identity, especially in the early years of the republic. The aim and scope of this study is to discuss the historiographical problems that emerged during this process of nation-building. They continue to have an impact today through the influential opinions of the field's founding figures.*

Goal and scope

> Another property of the human mind is that, when people can form no idea of distant and unfamiliar things, they judge them by what is present and familiar.[2]

The establishment of national identities through literary works has been on the agenda of European historians since the 18th century. The late Ottoman and early Republican historians who worked on the Ottoman literary past followed the footsteps of their European counterparts. Therefore, the scope of this

1 *T. C. Türkiye Yazma Eserler Kurumu Başkanlığı 2019–2023 stratejik planı* (2023), p. 32. This article is based on the first chapter of my PhD thesis (Akyol 2023, pp. 22–76).

2 Vico (2013), p. 76.

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study covers the ideas and enterprises of three literary historians of early modern Ottoman literature: Elias John Wilkinson Gibb (1857–1901), Mehmed Fuad Köprülü (1890–1966) and Ali Nihad Tarlan (1898–1978). As such, this study is focused on the period slightly before and after the founding of the Republic of Turkey, but because the strong influence of these names still continues today, it will also go beyond that limit.

This critique of Ottoman literary historiography seeks to inquire how a discipline, after being dominated by descriptive studies that eventually led to a vicious cycle, could be liberated from the ideological remnants of the 19th century.

The term "vicious cycle" refers here to a metaphorical pit in which the overwhelming majority of the field, that is, researchers in Ottoman literary historiography, could barely produce analytical knowledge in the last several decades. Even though there has been an increase and improvement in the field in recent years, these improvements are still mostly individual enterprises, not scholarly schools or institutions, and they are few in number.

"Ideological remnants" refers to the waning of a mentality's influence, which has decreased in comparison to the past, but not yet come to an end. National literary histories, which have been used as an ideological apparatus of modern identity since their inception, still maintain their teleological structure, sometimes obviously and sometimes implicitly. Indeed, literary histories written in the 21st century do not bear all the hallmarks of literary histories of the 19th century. While other perspectives than the national one have surfaced in literary studies, Pascale Casanova has argued that they have not superseded it.[3] In this context, the same teleological approach is still prevalent in studies on the history of literature in Turkey, especially in those produced in Turkey.

The criticism of a methodology cannot just be conducted through the motives inherent to literary history because the discipline is encumbered with the entanglement of different ideologies that go hand in hand with the sociopolitical currents in the late Ottoman Empire and the early Turkish Republic. This encumberment requires us to look at the historical context of literary historiography: the circumstances under which it was produced, the motivations that triggered it, the authors' identities, and the like.

3 Casanova (2007).

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The first examples: A very brief overview of the European corpus

The first histories of Ottoman literature in a modern sense were composed in the West in the first half of the 19th century. The underlying reason modern literary histories were written was precisely to build a national identity or to prove national legitimacy through literary histories. Comparable to the Greek case, which has been analyzed by Gregory Jusdanis, nationalistic literary narratives were motivated and triggered by a feeling of belatedness against their Western contemporaries.[4] In this process, the role of literary works was of great significance. In the rivalry of being the oldest civilization on earth, literary works were used as an instrument of nationalism[5] so that developing nations could be traced back to their 'ancient' cradles.

The professionalization of literary history-writing in the West commenced with Romanticism in the late 18th century,[6] and then climbed to its zenith during the burgeoning Herderian linguistic nationalism of the 19th century.[7] Indeed, Western scholars had previously dealt with the literature belonging to the 'other' geographies of the world, but were now looking at them with different eyes.[8] Thus, the eyes of Western scholars sooner or later would turn to Ottoman literature.[9] The distinguishing features of the Ottoman literary his-

4 Throughout his suggestive work, *Belated modernity and aesthetic culture*, Gregory Jusdanis investigates the central role of literature in building the Greek nation at that time when the Greeks revolted against the Ottoman Empire (Jusdanis 1991).

5 Damrosch (2018), p. 64.

6 Neubauer (2007), p. 127; also see Perkins (1992).

7 Aytürk (2004). For the term linguistic-nationalism, see Anderson (2006), p. 109; Casanova (2007), pp. 34–5.

8 Several books can be mentioned in the Ottoman context: Herbelot (1697); Toderini (1787); Donado (1688). Herderian literary histories assumed that nations were entities with specific linguistic and cultural properties. On Herder's ideas on historiography, there is a considerable corpus written in English and German. To acquire relevant information firsthand, one can look at Johann Gottfried Herder's two important works, *Ueber die neuere Deutsche Litteratur* (Riga, 1767) and *Von Deutscher Art und Kunst* (Hamburg, 1773). Among the secondary literature, I relied primarily on Rölleke's short but explanatory study (2005).

9 Among the pioneering 19th-century works on early modern Ottoman literary history are Thomas von Chabert's *Latifi oder biographische Nachrichten von vorzüglichen türkischen Dichtern* (1800), Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall's *Geschichte der osmanischen Dichtkunst bis auf unsere Zeit* (1836), Édouard Servan de Sugny's *La muse ottomane* (1855), Dora D'Istria's "La poésie populaire des Turcs Orientaux" (1873) and *La poésie des Ot-*

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tories of the 19th century were manifold: they were to present to Western readers Ottoman-Turkish literature; to distill a Turkish national genius in literary works; to propose a canon of authors and works identifiable as 'national'; and to confirm ancient myths and legends as the reflections of national grandeur in the past. These hallmarks were some of the most significant components of building a pedestal that would rise on the ground of language, history, and literature. On top of this pedestal stood national identity.[10]

Taken together, the mentality of 19th-century scholars working on Ottoman literary history was still strong at the beginning of the next century, and the discussion that revolved around this mentality would shape the literary histories to come. Its Herderian ideas, *text*-oriented[11] canonical perspective, and tendency to read Ottoman *dīvān* literature as a projection of state history are currently the most troubled parts of Ottoman literary historiography, and were inherited from that 19th century historiography. It could not be expected that such strong tendencies would suddenly disappear.

Gibb: The lack of Turkishness in Ottoman literature

European literary historiography in the 19th century was laudatory and unifying when writing national literary history. At the same time, it was slanderous, discriminative, and even sardonic when writing about the literary past of others. Therefore, it had a dual effect on the Ottomans: engendering influence and triggering reaction. On the one hand, 19th century Ottoman intellectuals, who oriented themselves towards Paris,[12] comprehended the function of liter-

tomans (1877), Stanley Lane-Poole's and Charles Wells's *The literature of the Turks: A Turkish chrestomathy* (1891).

10 Perkins (1992), pp. 1–4.

11 The materiality of texts, such as manuscript editions, linguistic and stylistic analysis, and the formal organization of literary works, are the main topics of the text-oriented approach. This approach basically excludes the historical context, and the social and material conditions in which the work was written.

12 Casanova had every reason to call Paris as Greenwich of world literature in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, see Casanova (2007), p. 87.

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ary history in creating national consciousness in Europe and wanted to reproduce it in their own context.[13]

On the other hand, they also had to react to European claims. Because their European counterparts considered Ottoman literature an imitation of Persian models, an originary 'Turkish' contribution was contested. This implication would force Ottoman intellectuals, who were accused of not being 'authentic' in the age of nationalism, to prove otherwise.[14]

The ideas and discussions by Şinasi, Namık Kemal and Ziya Paşa paved the way for teleological Ottoman literary histories in the second half of the 19th century.[15] This trio of Tanzimat intellectuals saw language and literature as one of the keys to the modernization of society and emphasized the importance of Turkish and Turkish literature. Thus, the first modern Ottoman literary histories were not full-fledged works based on historical research but pedagogical attempts to demonstrate a notable tradition of literary expression in Ottoman Turkish.

Today, it is generally held that the first modern example of an Ottoman literary history is Abdülhalim Memduh's *Tārīḫ-i Edebiyāt-ı ʿOsmāniye*, which was published in 1888/9. This *Tārīḫ was* a work of transition between tradition and modernity, and had a pedagogical approach toward Ottoman literary history. Whatever discussions it may have caused, this work *per se* must have been found rudimentary by its contemporaries. It had, therefore, only weak influence on following Ottoman literary historiography.

No other book of similar content was published in the Ottoman Empire from 1888/9 until 1910, but this is not to say that literary historiography went into hibernation. Just a few years before Abdülhalim Memduh's work, apart from articles concerning literary history in printed media, the leading novelist Halit Ziya authored his *Garptan Şarka Seyyâle-i Edebiyye Fransız Edebiyatı'nın Nümûne ve Tarihi* (1885/6). Also, Frédéric Loliée's *Tableau de l'histoire littéraire du monde* (1899) was translated into Turkish under the title of *Tārīḫ-i Edebī-*

13 There is an enormous secondary literature on this topic, but Gül Mete Yuva's book (2006) is particularly important because it deals directly with French influence on the intellectual atmosphere in the Ottoman Empire.

14 Çelik (2020), p. 13.

15 For details, see Yuva (2006), pp. 15–6 and 26; Akün (2012), pp. 76–7; Ziya Paşa (1999), p. 25; Kurnaz (1997); Namık Kemal (1999), p. 20.

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i ʿĀlem (1902/3).[16] This was fertile ground for Ottoman and Turkish literary histories of the first half of the 20th century.[17]

Not only via these works but also given the national education and its curriculum, the concept of literary history as a pedagogical tool found a lively atmosphere and rich soil in which it could flourish in the late 19th and the early 20th centuries. Looking at the biographies of the late Ottoman Empire's literary historians, or following Agah Sırrı Levend's comments on the issue,[18] official institutions such as the *Darülfünun* and *Mekteb-i Sultani* were the places where the idea of the nation became crystallized, perhaps the most significant ones.

In the same time frame, an influential book on early modern Ottoman literary history was written by a Scottish Orientalist, Elias John Wilkinson Gibb. His multivolume *History of Ottoman poetry* came out in England at the beginning of the 20th century, and was perhaps the last important and influential Ottoman literary history published in Europe.[19] Though it appears to have been a result of 19th-century mentality, Gibb's work was not completely encumbered by his predecessors' concepts. *A history of Ottoman poetry was*, above all, a literary history of a caliber surpassing all previous Ottoman attempts.[20] This history's collective view on Ottoman *dīvān* poetry, with its specific views on the world, nature, religion, and culture, brought for the first time a relatively analytical approach to the field. Its impact was vast compared to the previous histories.

Nevertheless, from where we stand today, we can see that the currents of Orientalism and nationalism of the 19th century pervaded Gibb's work. This situation is more pronounced in the sections in which Gibb dealt with Ottoman literary history before the 19th century in comparison to the parts in which he scrutinized modern Ottoman literature under Western influence. For him, all

16 I heard of this work during Halim Kara's speech entitled "Osmanlı'dan cumhuriyete: Türkiye'de modern edebiyat tarihçiliğinin oluşumu" within the scope of *Usulden yönteme: M. Fuad Köprülü'nün edebiyat tarihçiliği*, a workshop organized to discuss Köprülü's methodology for literary history. He also kindly sent me the mentioned source. With this, I would like to thank him for providing me with Loliée's *Tārīḫ-i Edebī-i ʿĀlem*.

17 Recaizade Mahmud Ekrem, Diyarbekirli Sait Paşa, Muallim Naci, Mehmed Celal, and Hacıbeyzade Ahmed Muhtar should be mentioned among those who produced works exhibiting some literary history aspects.

18 Levend (1973), p. 481.

19 Details about Gibb's life and work can be found in the following sources: Okuyucu (2007); Mengi (1999); Gür (2018); Koncu (2007).

20 Selim Sırrı Kuru indicates that Gibb's work is still the most detailed Ottoman literary history; see Kuru (2012), p. 549.

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the positive aspects of Ottoman poetry began with Şinasi, who was the leading herald of modern Ottoman literature, while traditional Ottoman literature was "helpless into the stagnant swamp of a dead culture".[21]

In regard to the 19th century, like his predecessors, Gibb also believed that general "characteristics of the Turkish nation" must have been reflected in the poetry. Connected with this idea, he first and foremost searched for the "Turkishness" in *dīvān* poetry. In the end, what he found was only imitation; Turkish poetry was considered not original. To him, the Ottomans were the parrots of the Persians, seeing the world through Persian eyes.[22] He believed that the

> great race to which the Ottomans belong … has never produced any religion, philosophy or literature which bears the stamp of its individual genius. This is because the true genius of that race lies in action, not in speculation.[23]

One may think that his ideas would have offended the intellectuals in Istanbul. However, responses to Gibb would be only be articulated after 2000, when *A history of Ottoman poetry* was translated into Turkish. Before that, his work appears to have been read and criticized by very few literary historians in Turkey.[24]

Even the arguments developed by Fuad Köprülü, whose ideas overlapped with Gibb's concerning Ottoman poetry's imitation of Persian poetry, were facile when he criticized Gibb. To him, the primary deficiency in Gibb's work was neither the method nor the analysis but its scope:[25] Gibb's *History of Ottoman poetry* restricted itself to Ottoman poetry. By contrast, Köprülü pursued the aim of writing a more comprehensive Turkish literary history to prove that Turkish literature, and hence the Turkish language and national identity, was as ancient as the literature of every civilized nation was supposed to be. This was the approach of a whole generation of Turkish literary historians in the first half of the 20th century.

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21 Gibb (1907), p. 3.

22 Gibb (1905), p. 5.

23 Ibid., p. 4.

24 Here, Halide Edip Adıvar's attempt in the 1940s to translate *A history of Ottoman poetry* into Turkish should be mentioned. Her translation was canceled with the opinion that Gibb's work was no longer relevant. See Okuyucu (2007), p. 615.

25 Köprülü (1999), pp. 3–47.

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Köprülü: Extending Turkish literature beyond the Ottoman past

In an environment in which the idea of the nation was focused on language as a principal marker of identity, a history of literary works was central. Thus, Ottoman intellectuals from a Muslim and Turkish-speaking background were prompted to legitimize their community's ancientness by pointing to a history of profound literary production.

By its very nature, this new idea reposed on a concept called 'the Turkic world', finding unity among the world's Turkic peoples. This brought a teleological structure to the Turkish literary history that would be produced in the following years. Many decades later, Mehmed Fuad Köprülü would identify this response as a feature belonging to the Romantic period of "the concept of national history."[26] Even today, this structure continues to haunt Ottoman literary historiography.

In the first half of the 20th century, Köprülü and some other literary historians eagerly read names such as Hippolyte Taine, Charles Augustin Sainte-Beuve, Gustave Lanson, Gaston Paris and Léon Cahun, i.e., the inheritors of Johann Gottfried Herder.[27] The nationalist, teleological, and Orientalist perspectives of the West pushed Ottoman literary historians into a defensive-reflexive position. Such an atmosphere prevailed in the literary historiography of the 1910s and, as can be expected, in the early Republican period.[28] The literary histories that Faik Reşad, Şehabeddin Süleyman, Köprülü and Mehmed Hayreddin wrote only years apart, to be taught at the *Darülfünun* and at high schools,

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26 "Milli tarih telâkkisinin romantik devrini, Türk nasyonalizmi de tabiatiyle görmüştür; Avrupa tarihçiliğinin Türkler hakkında hiçbir ilmî esasa dayanmıyan çok haksız menfî telâkkıyleri karşısında, bizim romantik tarihçiliğimizin aksül'ameli de ister istemez çok müfrit ve mübalâgalı olacaktı ve hakikaten öyle de oldu." Köprülü (1962), XXIII.

27 Şehabeddin Süleyman, Agah Sırrı Levend and others.

28 The most exceptional specimens of this atmosphere can be seen in the discussions made around the journal *Genç Kalemler*: "Bizim de edebiyatımız mahduddur, lakin edebiyatımızla mübahî, müteheyyic olmalıyız. Ne olursa olsun, edebiyat-ı garbiyye parlak imiş, bülend imiş; Hoca merhumun canına rahmet. Bana ne, sana ne?! … Bir Türk, ibtida-yı emirde Türklüğü, Osmanlılığı edebiyatına varıncaya kadar öğrendikten sonra kemalat-ı garbiyyece ıttılaından memleketini müstefid kılabilir. Maamafih o ıttıla da öyle üstün körü, yani, sathi olmamak şartıyla!" Ali Kemal (1999), p. 33.

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should be seen accordingly.[29] Yet, among these names, one would come to the foreground: Mehmed Fuad Köprülü.[30]

In 1913, Köprülü published his famous article "Türk edebiyatı tarihi'nde usul" ["Method in Turkish literary history"] in *Bilgi Mecmuası*, a periodical of *Türk Bilgi Derneği*. Among its members were Yusuf Akçura, Ahmed Ağaoğlu, and Ziya Gökalp. The journal was established to research Turkish language, literature, and history.[31] A new age began in Turkish literary historiography with the publishing of "Türk edebiyatı tarihi'nde usul," because it was the first serious attempt to create a methodology for literary history in Turkish.

The influence of Köprülü's article is still felt today, perhaps more than when it was written, and there is no historian of Ottoman literature today on whom his influence is not felt.[32] Indeed, his ideas were so pervasively extended to the universities, and so acutely determined the direction of inquiry, that one does not even have to read his works to be affected by him.

However, it does not seem entirely possible to say that his impact has always been positive. Köprülü's legacy in literary historiography, and how that heritage has been perceived and adopted, have sometimes blocked the road in the field and triggered or induced problems literary historians are still struggling with today.

Looking at the article written under the impact of the *Genç Kalemler* circle and Gustave Lanson in particular, we see that the concept of nation has a central place in Köprülü's methodology. Accordingly, the entire field of literary history aims to reveal the character of a nation from past to present through the literary 'masterpieces' it produced in the past.[33] These two cornerstones of literary historiography, that is the concept of nation and the masterpieces that were produced in the long course of history, still excessively occupy the agenda of Ottoman literary historians.

Considering his period, Köprülü's article was highly innovative in terms of Turkish academic literature, and for that matter, notwithstanding the nationalistic ideology and its projections in his article, the article retains some points

29 Levend (1973), pp. 480–2. For a review written by Köprülü of the first two works, see Köprülü (1914), p. 2.

30 See *Mehmed Fuad Köprülü bibliyografyası* (2017). In the first volume of this bibliography, there are 1572 entries relating to him. This number alone is enough to show his importance for the field.

31 Kaya (2020), pp. 85–109; Toprak (1987), pp. 247–54.

32 For a concise study evaluating Köprülü's career as a historian, see Berktay (1983).

33 Köprülü (1999), p. 25.

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that preserve their value even today. With this article, Köprülü discussed the methodology of the history of Turkish literature at a very early point.[34] The theoretical basis of his debate consists of scientific objectivity and the function of literary history as a scholarly field.

The text-oriented approach, which had been prevalent until then, does not exist in Köprülü's studies. To him, literature itself was a social phenomenon. Moreover, he was well aware of the fact that a literary history cannot be written using only literary texts. His methodology was mainly based on the text's historical context and involved all kinds of written sources, such as official documents, correspondence, registers, miscellanies, and all types of literary texts. Therefore, his relationship with literary history was holistic and in constant dialogue with the historical context and literary texts.[35]

However, Köprülü's literary history methodology remained inconclusive even in his own time. The scope we see in Köprülü's methodology, that is, the effort to understand literature in the integrity of not only literary works but the whole past, was not as broad in his successors' method. For this reason, even in Köprülü's period, we do not encounter any other name that approached literary historiography from a broader perspective. This has resulted in the historiography of early modern Ottoman literature being stuck in a narrow field that limited itself mainly to literary texts. The roots of today's Turkish literary historiography, primarily based on the publishing of transcribed Ottoman texts and non-analytical studies, lay here. As Selim Sırrı Kuru states, Köprülü's most distinctive hallmark was his holistic approach to literary history. It was an effort to understand literature in the historical context, using every kind of written source.[36]

The second point is the ongoing decisive and foundational position of the concept of nationalism, the route followed by Köprülü in Ottoman literary studies. Those who will read these lines may think at first glance that it is an oxymoron to see the concept of nationalism as a problem, because the reason for the establishment of an entire field – literary history – was the ideology

34 Köprülü summarizes the things prospective literary historians do as follows: i) to understand the literary work in the historical context; ii) to find the individual and original literary pieces; iii) to determine the imitational literary works; iv) to make a classification of genres; v) to study the influence of the literary work on the society. Köprülü (1999), p. 33. All translations are the author's unless otherwise stated.

35 Kuru (2008), p. 21.

36 Ibid., p. 22.

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of nationalism. Köprülü would become aware of the downside of nationalism, albeit he recognized it relatively late. At the beginning of the 1940s, he would confess that the influence of nationalistic romanticism prevailed in his previous works.[37]

Köprülü's confession seems to have been forgotten or overlooked by his successors. Nationalism's gradual fade in literary historiography on a global scale would become a rising trend by the second half of the 20th century, and beginning from the 1990s, it would lose its central role in mainstream literary historiography.[38] Ottoman literary historiography, however, does not seem to have followed these developments, even from afar. Other than a few historians who approached Ottoman literary history from a non-nationalist perspective and whose strength did not suffice to change the field altogether, Ottoman literature from the premodern period (ca. 15th to the early 19th centuries), is still treated as a national artifact. Because of the point global literary historiography has reached, approaching literary history from a national perspective is equivalent to not being able to see a massive forest for a couple of trees, as the German proverb says.[39]

Although many Ottoman historians commenced criticizing Köprülü's ideas in the second half of the 20th century,[40] the same criticism for the methodology he improved in literary historiography occurred only in the 2000s.[41] Yet, Köprülü has so far maintained his immunity and god-like status among early modern literary historians.[42] In a preface Köprülü wrote in 1966 for the book in which he collected his selected articles, Köprülü stated his

37 Köprülü (1962), p. XXIII.

38 In 1970, Hans Robert Jauß discussed the gaps found in literary historiography in great detail, heralding a new age in literary studies. See, Jauß (1970), pp. 11–66; also Perkins (1992), pp. 1–28, discusses this issue in detail.

39 "Den Wald vor lauter Bäumen nicht sehen."

40 Among them, Oktay Özel's and Halil Berktay's names are particularly worth mentioning. Özel (2012), pp. 267–75; Berktay (1983), p. 80.

41 Selim Sırrı Kuru maps the early development of Köprülü's ideas on literary history in two articles (Kuru 2007, 2008). Furthermore, an online workshop on the same topic was held in Samsun: *Usulden yönteme: M. Fuad Köprülü'nün edebiyat tarihçiliği*. Apart from these examples, Hatice Aynur (2009) and Semih Tezcan (2019, pp. 255–67) heavily criticized Köprülü's anachronistical term "Türkî-i Basit".

42 To give an example, Kazım Yetiş's stance reflects the typical attitude in the field of Ottoman literary history towards Köprülü as a founding father. In his two laudatory articles, Yetiş (2013, pp. 351–8; 2014, p. 672) extols Köprülü as a so-called savior who preserved "the value of Turkishness" against the Westerners.

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awareness that there had been no groundbreaking developments in Ottoman literary history that could change the road he had paved.[43]

In literary history, Nihad Sami Banarlı was Köprülü's most prominent successor, but Banarlı has never been treated as a serious literary historian because Banarlı's works were primarily prepared for high schools or written for popular ends. Banarlı's stance was conservative, and mixed with nostalgia for the imagined grandeur of the Ottoman literary past. Hence, Kazım Yetiş, a nationalist literary historian, was right when he described all of Banarlı's activities in literary history as "showing the beauty of Turkish literature."[44] In Banarlı, we see a defensive positioning against those who criticized *dīvān* literature; therefore, his efforts carried the signs of a nationalistic conservatism, striving to prove "the immortal place of Turkish classical literature that reflected the esthetical lives of the Turks."[45]

Tarlan: Rehabilitating Ottoman literature's Turkishness

Ali Nihad Tarlan was the first scholar to obtain the title "doctor of literature" from the *Darülfünun* in Republican Turkey. In 1922, before he received his doctoral degree under the supervision of Köprülü, he taught literature and language at various high schools in Istanbul, notably at *Mekteb-i Sultani*, as many Ottoman intellectuals who wrote works on literary history did in the same period. Eventually, after the university reform in 1933, he was assigned as an associate professor to the Department of Turkish Language and Literature at Istanbul University, where he continued a prolific scholarly life until his retirement.[46] Among the students trained by Tarlan were many researchers who steered the field of early modern Ottoman literary history.[47]

As a literary historian, Tarlan followed a different track than Köprülü, if not in his goal, but in his methodology. He believed, as Köprülü did, in the ideological necessity of writing a national literary history. Not only at the inception of his career but also in a late period like 1977, Tarlan described the primary goal

43 Köprülü (1999), p. XIII.

44 Yetiş (2014), p. 675.

45 Ibid., 683.

46 Çelebioğlu (1989), p. 6.

47 Names such as Halûk İpekten, Amil Çelebioğlu, Abdülkadir Karahan, Mehmet Ali Tanyeri, Gönül Tekin, Harun Tolasa, Günay Kut and Mehmed Çavuşoğlu are the most well-known. See Kut (2011).

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of his research as "to reveal the artistic genius of the great Turkish nation we belong to."[48] Accordingly, *dīvān* literature was one of the most important cultural products of Turkish national history:

> Our *dîvân* literature is a work of art that we can present to the civilized world with great pride … Calling *dîvân* literature the literature of the upper class and not considering it a national literature is as ignorant as thinking that the upper class in a nation does not belong to the same nation. Does a person who reaches a high level of contemplation and taste necessarily resign from his nationality? Nationality is not a dress. It is an entity that circulates in the veins.[49]

The most distinctive feature of Tarlan's methodology was his 'text-oriented' approach, focusing only on the analysis of literary texts, which separates him from Köprülü. As his professional title, *metinler şerhi profesörü*, suggests, his specialty was the exegesis of Ottoman literary texts.[50] Nevertheless, the most remarkable and fundamental feature of his approach is that he introduced the basics of edition critique to the field and developed a new analysis method that synthesized the old exegesis understanding with modern touches to Ottoman literary historiography. He worked on many subjects related to *dīvān* literature: the biography and psychology of poets, relationships and comparisons between Ottoman and Persian poetry, and so on.

This method of literary history was to display not the individuals but the journey of art, and that art is like a wind blowing in the garden of language;[51] one should follow the influence of this wind on the garden and ignore the individuals. Accordingly, for him "literary history is primarily the history of literary products."[52] As an achievement of Ottoman literary historiography, Tarlan

48 Tarlan (1989), p. 112.

49 "Dîvan edebiyatımız, medeniyet âlemine büyük bir iftiharla sunabileceğimiz bir san'at mahsulüdür … Dîvan edebiyatına havas edebiyatı deyip onu millî bir edebiyat saymamak, bir milletin içinde havassın o millete mensup olmadığını sanmak kadar cahilane bir hükümdür. Tefekkürü ve zevki yüksek bir seviyeye erişen bir insan, muhakkak, milliyetinden istifa etmiş mi sayılır? Milliyet, bir elbise değildir. O, damarlarda dolaşan bir varlıktır." Ibid., p. 112.

50 Açıl (2018), p. 87.

51 Tarlan (1948), p. III.

52 Ibid., p. III.

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is foremost among the researchers who best applied this method in the *école* he founded.

Tarlan was born in an era in which Ottoman *dīvān* literature was disappearing as an art form and bore witness to the last moments of a dying imperial giant which had enjoyed a six century lifespan. Contrary to today's researchers, he did not learn of this poetry later in his life but was born into it. He was, first and foremost, a keen reader of Ottoman *dīvān* poetry, not a student who learned it at university. Therefore, his perspective on Ottoman poetry was not an outsider's, but rather an insider's. He could clearly see the place of Ottoman poetry within the Islamic literary tradition, mainly its relationship with Persian classical poetry. Today, Tarlan's method has become institutionalized and diverged into some sub-branches, but it took its original form in the early republican period.

Tarlan's methodology should be approached from this point of view. On the one hand, the changing daily life came as an offspring of modernism and the divergence from the old culture stemmed from the decisions of modern state ideologists.[53] On the other hand, the language reforms instituted through the establishment of the Turkish Language Association,[54] the Latinization of the Turkish alphabet in 1928, and the appearance of purist linguistic-nationalism in the 1930s made *dīvān* literature, which was already a complicated field of study, a topic of academic study. From then on, Ottoman literary history became a subject that only well-equipped specialists could understand.

In fact, as a consequence of the modernization of Ottoman state and society, traditional Ottoman *dīvān* literature had withdrawn gradually from Ottoman life since the 19th century, drifting away and becoming more challenging to understand. Even the most distinguished names who worked on *dīvān* literature in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, such as Recaizade Mahmud Ekrem, Tahirü'l-Mevlevi, Ahmed Talat Onay, and Ali Nihad Tarlan were aware that they could not understand every detail and intricacy of this literature.[55]

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53 For a while in the early republican period, *dīvān* literature was not considered sufficiently 'Turkish' and was therefore excluded from the national narrative. On this issue, see Andrews (2004); Holbrook (1994).

54 Today, the website of *Türk Dil Kurumu* still welcomes its readers with the motto "our language is our identity" (*dilimiz kimliğimizdir*) on the homepage https://tdk.gov.tr (accessed on 8 February 2023).

55 Olgun (1995), p. 21, 72, and 102. For more on the difficulties of understanding Ottoman language, see Akyol (2022).

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In a time when early republican ideology tried to erase the Ottoman literary past and replace it with Turkish folk literature, Tarlan's position as a scholar who worked on Ottoman *dīvān* literature was not easy.[56] Apart from his nationalistic views, Tarlan mainly concerned himself with his research and publications. These motives explain why Tarlan gave importance to preparing new editions of early modern Ottoman literary works and the accompanying text exegeses. Quite naturally, it was an effort to make *dīvān* poetry, which had become an obscure historical relic even at that time, much more comprehensible. That effort, however, did not mean that his method was free from problems.

The problem with Tarlan's method from the beginning was that it was stuck in a narrow space, that is, text-centeredness. His approach was based on two simple points called 'external' and 'internal': by the former, he referred to some elements that he held as external to literary work, such as the period and milieu in which literary work was written, and the information about the manuscripts, including the differences between every copy; by the latter what he meant was the religious or mystical aspects of the literary work, the traces of life, individuals and the literary artistic features such as metaphors, allusions, wordplays, and so on.[57]

Even though he described his approach as such, Tarlan's focal point was to publish an Ottoman text with the Latinized alphabet and to introduce the thematic elements in the text. He was inclined to define his subject's historical background mainly by using dated secondary literature without consulting the Ottoman primary sources such as chronicles, archival documents, and the like, as often or as comprehensively as Köprülü did.

The approach Tarlan established was institutionalized in all its aspects in Istanbul University. Then it was spread by his students, who would open new departments at different universities founded in Turkey. Thus, it gradually became the guiding ethos of mainstream Ottoman literary studies in today's Turkey.

Furthermore, one ought not to forget that the path Tarlan followed was shaped by the necessities of his time. For want of a developed historical field, such as the Ottoman historical studies of today, Tarlan's research had to be carried out within a limited scope. In addition to the technical problems such as the establishment of the field from scratch, the lack of relevant studies in fields

56 About these discussions, see Hollbrook (1994), pp. 13–31.

57 Tarlan (1964), p. X.

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such as linguistics, anthropology, history, and psychology, the fact that modern Ottoman historiography was in its infancy, and society's distancing from the classical Ottoman literature and language on the way to modernity forced Tarlan to conduct preparatory works. Thus, what determined the characteristics of modern Ottoman literary historiography were the structural problems and the circumstances of the period in which Tarlan began his career. Therefore, we must turn our attention not to Tarlan as an individual historian, but rather to his standardized approach that still maintains its pivotal position in the field.

The legacy of Köprülü and Tarlan still holds a dominant place in the historiography of Ottoman literature. This situation raises ideological, methodological, and theoretical problems, which will be discussed below. For this reason, studies on the Ottoman literary past are still dominated by textual and text-centered approaches that are stuck in their compartments.[58] In contrast, an analytical approach that asks questions to the text, tries to evaluate a literary work in its context and acts in collaboration with other disciplines can be seen only in the practices of individual researchers rather than in mainstream historiography. General Ottoman literary histories covering the 14th to 19th centuries still lack this analytical approach. And those that are analytical are limited to a few monographs and articles.

Indeed, historians of Ottoman literature, with few exceptions, analyze Ottoman *dīvān* literature as a museum object frozen in a specific moment of the past and do not see it in its historical context. In other words, they often study it as an isolated or unique case, even within its history, let alone attaching it to world history. With some exceptions, this closeness leads to both not benefiting from the discussions in international literary studies and not contributing to them.

To summarize, the main reference books published under the rubric of Ottoman literary history still typically follow approaches established in the early 20th century. Studies that transcend these approaches are exceptions. Thus, the written culture of the Ottoman past is still waiting to be revisited in an analytical way. For these reasons, I believe that without criticizing the fundamental problems of this school, the belatedness in the field cannot be overcome.

58 By 'textual' I mean an approach that exclusively focuses on literary texts and excludes historial material (archival documents, non-literary texts, architecture, painting, music, etc.).

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Conclusion

> If you put the entirety of Turkish literature in one pan of a scale, and *Dede Korkut* in the other pan, *Dede Korkut* still tips the scale.[59]

Every student who graduates from Turkish literature and language departments in Turkey is aware of this quote from Köprülü. When I first heard it, I could not entirely comprehend the logic underneath. It was clear that Köprülü, as a literary historian, set a great deal of importance on this medieval epic,[60] and no other literary work written in Western Turkish was as crucial as *The book of Dede Korkut*. But why? Why, for instance, could no other work change the balance of the scale? Why not the eloquent and flowery examples of the Ottoman literary canon such as the works of Baki, Nefi, or Nedim, but only *Dede Korkut*, which was a literary work written by an anonymous writer using plain Turkish without being equipped with stylistic, refined, and sophisticated literary arts, as Ottoman *dīvān* poets were?

These questions remained unanswered until I came across a sentence that reminded me of Köprülü's phrase: "I have never found one among them [i.e., Orientalists] who could deny that a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia."[61] This quote belonged to Thomas Babington Macaulay, a 19th-century British historian and politician who believed that European literature was far more advanced than Oriental literatures, reflecting the time's European colonialist state-of-mind.

The parallel between these two phrases may not be evident at first glance. Macaulay's statement was a part of a speech in the British Parliament that emphasized a more developed European literature against the Oriental ones, thereby trying to legitimize the British colonial regime's control over Oriental education systems.

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59 Mehmed Fuad Köprülü's famous phrase: "Bütün Türk edebiyatını terazinin bir gözüne, *Dede Korkut*'u öbür gözüne koysanız, yine *Dede Korkut* ağır basar." Ergin (1969), p. IX.

60 The earliest surviving example of the Oghuz epic, a collection of twelve prose stories written in Turkish. See İz (2012).

61 I first read Macaulay's statement in Benedict Anderson's influential study on nationalism, *Imagined Communities* (Anderson 2006, p. 91), and to satisfy my curiosity, I looked up the source of the quotation. I found the exact mainstream Orientalist state-of-the-mind of the 19th century described by Edward Said in detail in his text *Orientalism*. For the original text, see Macaulay (1920), p. 109.

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Returning to Köprülü, his statement had nothing to do with the colonial mentality, and he was not comparing Turkish literature with any nation's literature or trying to declare that Turkish literature outdoes other literatures of the world. He juxtaposed a product of Turkish literature side by side with the entire corpus of Turkish literary history, emphasizing that *Dede Korkut* is by far the most important Turkish literary work ever written.

The reason lurking behind Köprülü's statement was structurally similar to Macaulay's: trying to legitimize and thus establish the solid existence of Western Turkish literature before the Ottomans, whose spoken and literary language was an amalgam of foreign elements such as the two major languages, Arabic and Persian, as well as Greek, Italian, Kurdish, Hebrew, and so on. To Köprülü and his followers, notably the famous Turkish language historian Muharrem Ergin, *Dede Korkut* was a genuine epic of the Oghuz Turks, the forefathers of Turkish existence in Anatolia, the homeland of the newly founded Republic.[62]

With this work in hand, Köprülü believed that he could prove the possibility of a full-fledged and developed existence of Turkish literature and, subsequently, the Turkish language and race, remembering once again the Herderian revolution. Therefore, he and his like-minded successors tried to date *Dede Korkut* to an imaginary past in which Oghuz Turks could compose such successful literary works.[63]

This so-called contextualization was a delicate effort and can be approached from two different angles. First, Köprülü tried to prove the existence of a genuinely Turkish literary product, which is based on a vernacular version of Western Turkish, freed as much as possible from the "foreign elements" with which Ottoman *dīvān* literature was stained. This stemmed from the early republican search for such 'pure' language works that were uncontaminated by elements the nationalist ideologues believed foreign.

The second angle is the position of Turkish literature on the world stage. The works of Dante, Boccaccio, Chaucer, and many other authors who used their vernacular language in preference to Latin had been integrated into national narratives in Europe when Köprülü uttered the statement mentioned above. That the nationalistic literary historiographies proudly presented literary works written not in Latin but in vernacular languages, which were seen

62 Ergin (1969), p. XIV.

63 Although it is generally accepted that the work was written in the second half of the 15th century, some argue that the stories in the work date back to the 6th century.

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as a vital basis of their nations, must have influenced Köprülü. The importance he attached to *Dede Korkut* emphasized that Turks, too, produced their national epics as early as their European counterparts, or maybe even much earlier, if one thinks of *Dede Korkut*'s oral origins, which were believed to be far older than the written text.

A Turkish national epic needed to be found for the sake of national identity. It was already known that the Oghuz Turks had an epic, *Oğuzname*, but it did not exist as a whole, and historians knew of its existence mostly from historical references. *Dede Korkut*, in this sense, was seen as a part of this lost Turkish epic. Therefore, it was dated back not to the time when it was put to paper but to an unknown time span during which it was believed *Dede Korkut* might have been created within the oral tradition of the *Oğuzname*.

In parallel to these ideas, Köprülü tried to identify a pure Turkish linguistic vein in Ottoman literary history. Köprülü engaged in multiple attempts, one after the other, on the matter in question. Collecting literary works written in all branches of the Turkic languages under a single roof, as if there were organic ties between them,[64] nationalizing the *ʿāşıḳ* tradition,[65] and proving the existence of Ottoman *dīvān* poets who preferred to write in Turkish with a purist understanding were some of the issues that Köprülü pursued.

Köprülü's thesis of an Ottoman-period literary movement promoting a plainer Turkish (*Türki-i Basit*) has been met with increasing criticism since the 1990s.[66] Increasingly criticized since the 1990s, Köprülü's efforts have never been completely discarded in literary history.[67] With this claim, Köprülü purported to prove the existence of Ottoman *dīvān* poets who wrote consciously in Turkish. Thus, Köprülü tried to create a national narrative– if teleologically– of Ottoman *dīvān* poetry, by more-or-less cherry-picking some examples deliberately from a wide variety of literary products. Because of the linguistic discrepancy between Ottoman and modern Turkish, Köprülü did not see *dīvān* literature as a national product. By way of the *Türki-i Basit concept*,

64 While the Turkic languages are related in terms of linguistics, there has not always been a relationship between the literary works produced in these languages.

65 An *ʿāşıḳ* was a minstrel who played and sang his own or others' poems on a string instrument and told folk tales.

66 Köprülü (1999), pp. 271–315.

67 Köprülü's stance on the "Türki-i Basit" was been widely accepted and promoted by Nihal Atsız, Agah Sırrı Levent, Nihat Sami Banarlı, Ahmet Kabaklı, Hasibe Mazıoğlu, Faruk Kadri Timurtaş, Kemal Sılay and many other historians. See Aynur (2012).

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he would both have identified an authentic 'Turkish' vein of Ottoman literature, which he criticized for being an imitation of Persian literature, and have shown that there was a tendency among *dīvān* poets to prioritize the Turkish language over the Arabic and Persian elements in Ottoman Turkish. By doing so, he attempted to put Ottoman *dīvān* literature into a national framework.

Ali Nihad Tarlan took a more contentious approach than his predecessor by severely criticizing the notion that *dīvān* literature is 'not national' and approaching that attitude as an indicator of ignorance. Although Tarlan was conscious of the fact that the *dīvān* poets did not have a sense of nationality in modern terms,[68] he went so far as to claim that "*dīvān* literature is the Turks' own property."[69] Thus, from a nationalist point of view, Tarlan tried to prove that *dīvān* literature *was* a national literature to nationalists who claimed the opposite.

Among the representatives who followed Tarlan's nationalist approach up to the present day were some who took it to a more ideological level, and Ottoman literary historiography still carries these ideological burdens of nationalism. The motives for the beginning and continuation of this field's historiography have always been feelings of 'belatedness' in comparison to the West and the task of establishing one's own national past.

Accordingly, what did not fit the ideological commitments of the founding fathers, i.e., what was defined as not "ours" or not desired, was left out, not seen, not taken in, censored, or outright rejected. As Cemal Kafadar states, it was difficult to comprehend in the national age the fluidity and permeability of identities during the Ottoman early modern era.[70] In particular, Persian, Arabic, Armenian, Kurdish, Hebrew, and Greek works are barely evaluated in this context. The nationalist focus is almost entirely on Ottoman works written by Turkish Muslim men. Here, 'Turkish' refers to an anachronistic ethnicity, 'Muslim' to Sunni Islam, and 'men' to the masculine, assumed to have a heteronormative sexual orientation.

The same nationalist focus excluded parts of Ottoman literary history that early Republican Turkish nationalists considered inappropriate and incompatible with their ideas. This situation led to age-old censorship. Concerning Ottoman literary historiography, censorship could be a separate field of research – censorship and distortion are most evident in themes involving issues such

68 Tarlan (1989), p. 105.

69 Ibid., p. 108.

70 Kafadar (1995), p. 28.

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as love, sexuality, and alcohol consumption. Considering that *dīvān* literature was intertwined with these matters, the gravity of the issue becomes even more apparent.[71]

The reason why Ottoman literary history studies focus on the 16th century is also related to the nationalization process. Modern historians saw the 'zenith' of the Ottoman past in the 16th century. In this context, the internal dynamics of Ottoman *dīvān* literature were interpreted in line with the state's history, similar to what the 19th-century Orientalists had previously done.[72] For that reason, the history of *dīvān* literature was read under the shadow of military victories and the state's territorial expansion. Because the vast majority of literary historians have not overcome the established metaphor of the Ottoman 'rise and decline paradigm'[73] and continue to work from within that paradigm, they also position the historicity of *dīvān* literature within this framework.

The root of these problems is the teleological reconstruction of Ottoman literary history. When nationalist ideological motives mandate that the history of literature is read parallel to the history of political victories, the above-mentioned issues become invisible. Literary historians have thus overlooked how the transition from a medieval dynastic state to an early modern bureaucracy[74] in the late 16th and the early 17th centuries affected the production, content, and circulation of *dīvān* literature.

In sum, the symptoms of Ottoman literary historiography's chronic disorders emerged directly parallel to the nation-state construction process.

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71 I will limit myself to giving examples such as the fact that even Nefi's *Sihām-ı Ḳażā* [Shafts of Doom], the most famous satire collection from the early 17th century, could not be published without censorship until 2018. The previous versions were full of censored words. Gelibolulu Ali's *Mevā'idü'n-Nefā'is*, too, is a victim of the same censorship which left some parts of the text untranslated because they were deemed "immoral". For details, see Nefi (2020); Akkuş (1998); Gelibolulu Mustafa Ali (1997).

72 For instance, Servan de Sugny (1855, pp. XXXIV and XXVIII) saw and treated the history of Ottoman poetry as a direct projector of Ottoman political history, just as many literary historians who work on early modern Ottoman literature mistakenly do today. "On the other hand," he wrote, "it is certain that the phases of poetry in the Ottoman Empire were the same as those of the political state." Thus, the so-called glorious and sublime days of Süleymān I would find their echo directly in Ottoman poetry, and the phases of poetry coming after would be conveyed in line with the infamous narration of Ottoman decline.

73 For the discussions, see Kafadar (1998), pp. 30–75.

74 Tezcan (2010), p. 10.

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Furthermore, it led to (i) a failure to understand multilingualism[75] and multiculturalism in early modern Ottoman literary culture; (ii) non-analytical approaches and publications; (iii) self-censorship and denial in regard to multiculturalism, minorities, gender issues, pornography, invectives, etc.; and iv) a state-focused literary history, which saw the history of the state and literature in parallel.

Apart from noteworthy studies of a monographic scope, there is still no non-nationalist Ottoman literary history available today that perceives and recognizes the literatures of all the communities of the Ottoman geography as necessary and worthy of study. Instead, the works we have are full of the ideological sediments of the past.

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75 Kim & Bashkin (2021), pp. 130–45.

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