Paris' betrayal [...] led to a war. Rulers of Greece and neighbouring regions, led by Agamemnon, [...] attacked Troy and besieged the town for ten years. After numerous and heavy battles during that period, they succeeded in conquering it by the trick devised by Ulysses. Ulysses had ordered the construction of a huge wooden horse. In the horse's belly he had hidden a selection of the bravest soldiers. Then he sent the Trojans the message: 'We are leaving now for our countries, but we leave behind this wooden horse as a souvenir of the battles.' The Trojans pulled the horse into the town. [...] At nightfall the soldiers hidden in the horse's belly came out and let the other soldiers in as well. They destroyed the town and defeated and killed its citizens.

Agamemnon was the most eminent of the rulers of the Achaeans, the bravest was Achilles, the cleverest Odysseus and the most eloquent was Nestor. The greatest hero of the Trojans was Hector, the brave and unparalleled son of Priam, Aeneas was the most heroic prince after him.

Although repeatedly translated into European languages, the fact that these two famous, valuable and old works have still not been translated into the Ottoman language is a cause for grief. Therefore, I started at once to translate, print and publish, step by step, the aforementioned work from its original language. 

Na'ım Fraşeri, Ilyada. Eser-i Homer (İstanbul, 1303/1885-1886), preface, 5-7, translated from Ottoman Turkish

As far as is known, no translation of the poems of Homer into Ottoman Turkish existed until 1885. Na'ım Fraşeri claims this in the preface to his translation of the first song of the Iliad (Ilyada: Eser-i Homer). Ottoman Turks may have known about Troy and Homer for centuries, but they had never felt a need to translate the poems into Ottoman Turkish until the nineteenth century. While Heinrich Schliemann's archaeological activities in Troy in the 1870s stimulated Ottoman interest in Homeric epics, the nineteenth-century modernizations, the progress in public education, the rise of printing and publishing and innovations in Ottoman literature also

---

1  The author uses both the Latin and Greek names.

2  Parts of this chapter, including figures and captions, appeared in Uslu, 'Homer and Troy in 19th-Century Ottoman Turkish Literature.'
created a situation in which Homer could enter Ottoman art, culture and literature.

Indeed, the literary importance of Homer’s epics, the attempts to translate the *Iliad* into Ottoman Turkish, biographical notes on the poet, informative articles in Ottoman periodicals and newspapers on Homeric epic and the topographical characteristics of Homeric locations came at a time when Western literature and Ancient Greek and Roman literature were finding their place in Ottoman culture.³

For all the interest and enthusiasm, however, no single complete Turkish version of Homer’s oeuvre had ever been produced in the Ottoman Empire. The new translators were pioneers and doubtless experienced all the frustration of the complexities involved. Interest in Homer flourished in the new Ottoman literary era, particularly from the 1850s to the second constitutional period (1908). However, to get a better understanding of the role of Homer in Ottoman literature and to position the rising interest among Ottoman intellectuals in Homeric epic in the late Ottoman Empire, it also is useful to examine early Ottoman interest in Homer and Troy.

1 Early Ottoman-Turkish Interest in the Homeric Epics

Ottoman Turks were no strangers to Troy, Homer and Homeric epic. In fact, Sultan Mehmed II, the conqueror of Istanbul (1432-1481), was greatly interested in Homer and Troy and his personal library at the Topkapı Sarayı includes a valuable Greek edition of the *Iliad* (Fig. 30).⁴ The collections of the libraries in Istanbul also include medieval Arabic manuscripts referring to the story of the Trojan horse and ‘the tricks of sovereigns.’ One of these manuscripts was completed in 1475, probably commissioned by Sultan Mehmed II.⁵

Mehmed II’s desire to gain historical legitimacy by identifying with the Trojans is mentioned in Chapter 1. As Michael Kritovoulos’s official chronicle states, Mehmed II praised Homer and admired the ruins of the

---

³ The way Homer was approached, read and translated is not the main point of this study. Much has been written about Homer and the reception of Homer. However, little attention has been paid to the Ottoman-Turkish perspective. Since the archaeological activities in Troy stimulated the Ottoman interest in Troy and Homer, this chapter briefly reviews literary interest in Homer in the Ottoman Empire and provides a cursory description of the reception of Homer at this time. For the reception of Homer from the late Antiquity to the present, see: Clarke, *Homer’s Readers, and Young, The Printed Homer*. On Homer himself, see: Graziosi, *Inventing Homer*.

⁴ Mehmed II’s library, Topkapı Sarayı Museum, Istanbul, GI2.

⁵ Kreiser, ‘Troia und die Homerischen Epen,’ 282.
Ancient city on his visit to Troy in 1462. He identified with the Trojans and — referring to the conquest of Istanbul in 1453 — celebrated the victory of ‘us’ Asians over the descendants of the ‘Greeks, Macedonians and Thessalians and Peloponnesians.’

The Turks probably knew about Homer before Sultan Mehmed II’s reign. They were certainly familiar with figures and events in Homeric literature. The epic stories of the heroic age of the Turkish tribe of the Oğuz that make up the Book of Dede Korkut include themes analogous to the Homeric poems. This collection about the morals, values, pre-Islamic beliefs and athletic skills of the Turkic people was transmitted orally for centuries before it was recorded, probably in the fifteenth century. The tale of the Oğuz hero Basat killing the cyclops-like Tepegöz — who had been terrorizing the Oğuz realm — is a creative adaptation of Odysseus’ struggle with Polyphemus. And the Alpamysh (Alpamış) epic, which probably circulated during the Turkic Kaghanate as early as the sixth to eighth century in Central Asia, also includes Homeric themes.

Interest in Homer and Troy is also apparent in later periods. The comprehensive seventeenth-century Arabic history Camiüd – düvel (Compendium of nations) and the Ottoman-Turkish version Sahaif-ül Ahbar (The pages of the chronicle) by Ottoman astronomer, astrologer and historian Ahmed Dede Müneccimbaşı (1631-1702) identifies the Trojan War as the seminal event in Greek history and discusses the location and history of Troy.

Another famous work touching on Troy is Mustafa ibn Abdullah’s Cihannüma. Known as Katip Çelebi (1609-1657), this celebrated Ottoman scholar’s abundantly illustrated volume on geography, topography, history and astronomy was based on a synthesis of Islamic and Western sources.

6 Kritovoulos, History of Mehmed the Conqueror, 181-182; on Sultan Mehmed II’s interest in the heroes of Classical Antiquity and his identification with the Trojans, see: Babinger, Fatih Sultan Mehmed ve Zamanı, 418-421; Yerasimos, ‘Türkler Romalıların mirasçısı midir?,’ 69-71; Kreiser, ‘Troia und die Homerischen Epen,’ 282; Adıvar, Osmanlı Türklerinde İlim, 25-26; Rijser, ‘The Second Round.’

7 Bremmer, ‘Odysseus versus the Cyclops,’ 136; for a discussion of issues such as the time in which the stories were created or recorded, see: Kafadar, Between Two Worlds, 94, 177-179; Lewis, The Book of Dede Korkut; and Meeker, ‘The Dede Korkut Ethic.’

8 For a detailed study on Alpamysh, see: Paksoy, Alpamys; in relation to Homeric literature: Fattah, Tanrıların ve Firavunların Dili; and Meydan, Son Truvalılar.

9 Ahmed Dede Müneccimbaşı was court astrologer to Mehmed IV (1642-1693). The Turkish version of Camiüd – düvel is a summary translation by a committee led by the prominent poet Ahmed Nedim during the reign of Sultan Ahmed III (1673-1736): the Tulip Age in which arts, culture and architecture flourished. The work is based on Arab, Persian, Turkish and European sources. Roman and Jewish sources may also have been used for this universal history; see: ‘Ahmed Dede Muneccimbaşi’; Kreiser, ‘Troia un die Homerischen Epen,’ 282.
The seventeenth-century work was printed in Istanbul in 1732. It includes a version of the story of Troy, probably based on a middle Greek/Byzantine narrative and written by Ebu Bekir ibn Behram ed-Dibeşki (d. 1691).10 Troy and Homeric characters appear again in Tarih-i Iskender bin Filipos (History of Alexander the son of Philip), published in 1838 and reprinted in 1877, and in an Ottoman-Turkish translation of Flavius Arrianus’ (89-145/146 AD) Anabasis Alexandrou. After describing Alexander’s arrival in Troy, the translator, probably George Rhasis, pays particular attention to the circumstances in which Priam, Achilles and Hector met their death and informs his readers about the enmity between the races of Priam and Neoptolemos. Presumably, the author was trying to make his narrative more accessible for an Ottoman audience. Since the edition was published in Cairo it remains debatable whether it actually reached Ottoman readers in the capital or other large cities of the Empire.11

Another work on Ancient Greek history, including Homer and Troy, appeared soon after in Istanbul: Tarih-i Kudema-yi Yunan ve Makedonya (History of Ancient Greek and Macedonia), apparently written by Agribozi Melek Ahmed in the 1850s during the reign of Sultan Abdülmecid.12 With the publication of Tarih-i Yunanistan-i Kadim (The Ancient history of Greece) in 1870, Istanbul’s readers had ample opportunity to learn about Ancient Greek geography, people, authors, heroes and mythology in detail.13

Classical Philosophers in Ottoman Islamic Culture
The Ottomans also knew Homer through Medieval Persian and especially Arabic studies of Ancient works. It was through Arab interest in Classical Greek literature that much of Greek and Hellenistic philosophy and science had been preserved in Syriac and Arabic texts in the Middle Ages.

10 Mustafa b. Abdullah, Kitab-i Cihannüma li-Katib Çelebi (Konstantiniye 1145/1732), 667-669, in Kreiser, ‘Troia und die Homerischen Epen,’ 282-289; Cihannuma was printed by the Ottoman Empire’s first Islamic printing house, set up by İbrahim Müteferrika: 500 copies were printed. See: Çelebi, Kitab-i Cihannümâ li-Katib Çelebi; and Sarıcaoğlu, ‘Cihannüma ve Ebubekir b. Behram ed-Dimeşki – İbrahim Müteferrika.’
11 Kitab-i Tarih-i Iskender bin Filipos (Cairo 10/Ra/1234) (03/06/1838) Tarih-i Iskender bin Filipos (Cairo 1294/1877); for an account of the original work, the identity of the translator and the circumstances under which the translation was made, and its reception, see: Yüksel, Türk Edebiyatında Yunan Antikitesi, 23-35; and Strauss, ‘The Millets and the Ottoman Language,’ 203-207.
13 Yüksel, Türk Edebiyatında Yunan Antikitesi, 30-38; Tanpinar, XIX. Asır Türk Edebiyatı Tarihi, 140; Kayaoğlu, Türküyede Tercüme Mâesseseleri, 81.
Classical philosophers such as Socrates, Plato and Aristotle were considered important figures in Islam; they were perceived as legendary characters of an Islamic era. In the ninth century, some Arab scholars were even thought to prefer Aristotle to the Koran.\(^\text{14}\) And Plato, as the historian Dursun Ali Tokel notes, was considered a prophet by several Islamic scholars.\(^\text{15}\)

As a part of, and, for a long time, as rulers of the Islamic world, the Ottomans had access to these medieval Arabic studies of Ancient Greek literature. Gradually, Ancient philosophy became a major part of the Ottoman political and cultural world and as historian Cemal Kafadar states, Classical figures such as Plato, Aristotle, Hippocrates and Galen became the foundation of the Ottoman Islamic culture.\(^\text{16}\)

Homer was known as the ‘wandering poet’ in the Muslim world. While poetry was not the focus of Arabic studies, Arabic translations included fragments and quotes from Homer, while biographies of Homer appeared in dictionaries and encyclopaedias. The influential Muslim philosopher Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406) informs readers in his *Al-Muqaddimah* (Prolegomenon, 1377) that ‘Aristotle, in his logic, praises the poet Umatîrash [Homer].’\(^\text{17}\) It is widely accepted that Ibn Khaldun was a vital source of inspiration for Ottoman scholars such as Katip Çelebi (1609-1657) and Mustafa Naima (1655-1716).\(^\text{18}\)

**The Search for Change in Ottoman Literature**

Although Ottoman Turks appear to have known Homer and Homeric themes and characters, no Ottoman-Turkish version of Homer's tales was produced until the nineteenth-century reforms and modernization. As Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar, an authority on Turkish literature, explains, ‘with the Tanzimat edict of 1839, the Empire and the society left a circle of civilization in which it had lived for centuries and declared its entrance into another civilization,’ the Western European civilization it had confronted for centuries. The government explicitly accepted European values and the basic principles

---

\(^\text{14}\) Manguel, *Homer's The Iliad and The Odyssey*, 80-82; Tanpınar, *XIX. Asır Türk Edebiyatı Tarihi*, 38.

\(^\text{15}\) Tökel, *Divan Şüirinde Mitolojik Unsurlar*, 424.

\(^\text{16}\) On the antique origins of Ottoman political ideas, see: Kafadar, ‘Osmanlı Siyasal Düşün-cesinin Kaynakları Üzerine Gözlemler.’

\(^\text{17}\) Translated in Manguel, *Homer's The Iliad and The Odyssey*, 80; on Homer in the Islamic world, see: Manguel, *Homer's The Iliad and The Odyssey*, 80-89; and Kraemer, ‘Arabische Homerverse.’

of the Enlightenment and made modernization a state programme. These reforms and changes in political, economic and social life triggered a search for change in Ottoman literature.19

Nineteenth-century Ottoman literature – New Ottoman (Turkish) or Tanzimat Literature – interacted with Western literature.20 In the second half of the nineteenth century, Ottoman writers adopted European literary forms. Educating the public in Western ideas was a major concern in the literary scene of this era, which was dominated by Tanzimat statesmen, civil servants and intellectuals proficient in different languages and educated in new Western-style schools. The authors of the New Ottoman Literature movement wrote for public instruction. The new Western-style literary genres such as novels, plays, philosophical dialogues and essays enabled new ideas to be introduced, and to be interpreted and discussed by the reading public.21

2 New Ottoman Literature: Educating the Public and Changing Perceptions

Helen, only eighteen years old, a prominent figure of her time, deserved to be described as the personification of love. Is it possible that the longing, the coquetry and entreats of a person deep in love, as Paris was, would not affect such a beauty that was wholly created of desire, fertility and affection? Would the laws of human nature allow this?

In his work, the Iliad, the leading poet Homer composed the poem about the historical [Trojan] war in the form of verses. I, a humble translator, had a strong desire to translate this story by retaining the original language of it as much as possible. No, it is not a disgrace! In my opinion it is more justified to strengthen a strong desire to improve public instruction than to remove the impetus.

Selanikli Hilmi, Ilyas yahud şâir-i şehîr Omiros (İstanbul, 1316/1898-1899), introduction, z, yd, ye, translated from Ottoman Turkish

19 Tanpinar, XIX. Asır Türk Edebiyatı Tarihi, 126-129; Enginün, Yeni Türk Edebiyatı, 24-25.
20 Historians of Turkish literature call the period between 1839 and 1923 the age of New Ottoman (Turkish) Literature or Tanzimat Literature. The proclamation of the second constitutional monarchy in 1908 is considered a turning point in this period with its radical political and cultural changes and its impact on literature. See: Enginün, Yeni Türk Edebiyatı, 9, 5-27; Yüksel, Türk Edebiyatında Yunan Antikitesi, vii, 1. On the history of literature in the late Ottoman Empire, its various movements and leading figures, see also: Tanpinar, XIX. Asır Türk Edebiyatı Tarihi; Moran, Türk Romannın Eleştirel bir Bakış; Evin, Origins and Development of the Turkish Novel; Finn, The Early Turkish Novel; and Akyüz, ‘La Littérature Moderne de Turquie,’ 465-634; see also: Ortaylı, Imparatorlukun En Uzun Yüzyılı, 225-257.
21 Enginün, Yeni Türk Edebiyatı, 25, 32.
As Selanikli Hilmi states in the preface to his translation of the first book of Homer’s *Iliad*, the main purpose of Ottoman literary production following the Tanzimat edict was the improvement of public instruction (Fig. 31). This related fundamentally to the circumstances in which the reforms were introduced. It was a time of weakness and disintegration, and leading figures in Ottoman society hoped to save the Empire with wide-scale modernization. Authors of literary texts, as Inci Enginün points out, played a major part in disseminating Tanzimat principles to the population. Since the reforms were not based on a broad intellectual movement, writers hoped to contribute to a revival of Ottoman society. The literature of this period has a liberal dose of social relevance. Newspapers and periodicals served as a tool for education and the maintenance of modernization with a major impact on literary life and individual writers. The reading public had correspondingly high expectations of the press.\(^2\)

Despite the new era, press freedom continued to be extremely limited until 1908.\(^2\) Nonetheless, as the modernizations were introduced, progress in public education and increased literacy were accompanied by a rapid expansion of the press.\(^2\) The number of publications grew and periodicals and newspapers reached an ever wider audience.\(^2\) Yet during the reign of Abdülhamid II (1876-1908) it became increasingly impossible to publish about political matters. Words such as republic, revolution, anarchy, socialism, constitution, equality, nation, justice, native, coup, freedom, bomb, etc., were banned from the press.


24 The increasing literacy was partly the result of public initiatives. State-sponsored schools at different levels emerged in the late nineteenth century. As a consequence, the literacy rate of the Muslim Ottoman population, which was about 2-3 percent in the early nineteenth century, increased to approximately 15 percent in the final years of the Empire. See: Quataert, *The Ottoman Empire*, 169. For a comprehensive treatment of the progress in Turkish public education, see: Ergin, *Türkiye Maarif Tarihi*. See also: Iskit, *Türkiye’de Nesrîyat Haraketlerine bir Bakış*, 93-97; Engin, 1868’den 1923’e Mekteb-i Sultani; Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey*, 179-184; Berkes, *Türkiye’de Çağdaşlaşma*, 202-216.

25 Zürcher, *Turkey*, 78. Before 1840, annually eleven books were published in Istanbul. By 1908, ninety-nine printing houses published 285 books, in Quataert, *The Ottoman Empire*. For the rise of printing and publishing in the Ottoman Empire in the nineteenth century, see also: Strauss, ‘Who Read What in the Ottoman Empire (19th-20th Centuries)?’, 42.
explosion, strike and assassination were strictly forbidden. Instead, newspapers and periodicals concentrated on technology, science, geography, history and literature.

Modern cultural life had gradually found a way into the main cities of the Empire, such as Istanbul, Izmir and Thessalonica. The changing cultural atmosphere triggered many discussions. Supporters and opponents formulated their views in prose, poetry, novels and plays. As Tanpınar explains, nineteenth-century literature was the product of an age of ‘civilization struggle.’

Translations of French Neoclassical Works: New Perspectives on the Ancients

The creators of New Ottoman Literature drew inspiration from Western literature. Various Western works of science, philosophy and literature were translated into Ottoman Turkish. The increasing openness to European culture was closely related to the establishment of institutions such as the Tercüme Odası (Translation Office, 1832), Encümen-i Danış (Imperial Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1850/51), Cemiyet-i İlimiye-i Osmaniye (Ottoman Scientific Society, 1860) and various newspapers and periodicals in the second half of the nineteenth century.

Many intellectuals – some connected to these institutions and others not – also translated Western works on their own initiative. Translation was a way of learning or practising a foreign language. Ottomans translated ancient Greek works such as Homer and Greek philosophers like Plato, Aristotle, and others into Ottoman Turkish. This cultural exchange was not only a way of learning but also a means of preserving and promoting classical knowledge.

It is generally agreed that the state contributed little to coordinate these translations. Literary production in this period was therefore highly diverse. Translators usually selected works to translate based on personal preference and popularity; their main concern was content rather than form or style. Yet institutions such as the Encümen-i Danış and Cemiyet-i İlimiye-i Osmaniye and the translation offices would also have been engaged in managing literary translations. See: Tanpınar, XIX. Asır Türk Edebiyatı Tarihi, 139-141, 142-143, 263-266, 270-273; Yüksel, Türk Edebiyatında Yunan Antikitesi, 3; Strauss, ‘Romanlar, ah! O Romanlar!’; Ortaylı, İmparatorluğun en usun yüzüly, 244-254. For a detailed survey on Ottoman translation institutions, see also: Kayaoğlu, Türkiye'de Tercüme Müesseseleri; Aksoy, ‘Translation Activities in the Ottoman Empire.’
generally concentrated on the leading literary figures of the French neoclassical period, such as Racine, Molière, Corneille and La Fontaine. So French literature and its various movements became increasingly influential. Philosophical works were especially popular: Münif Pasha biographies of Ancient philosophers were particularly well regarded among Muslim intellectuals of the time.

Given the prominence of Ancient Greek and Roman themes in neoclassical works, the Ottoman taste for this genre gave Classical literature and Classical mythology a prominent place in Ottoman literature and arts, while intellectuals associated with the new literary movement frequently referred to Greek Antiquity in essays and prefaces to publications.

As major French neoclassical works entered Ottoman literature, readers gained an opportunity to widen their once overwhelmingly Islamic perspective on Classical authors. They began to compare Islamic perspectives with new Western perceptions. Ottoman readers came to see these works in a different light and to view the Ancients from a different angle.

This new perspective on Classical literature encouraged Ottoman writers to read and translate Ancient Greek authors further. One of the most popular Ancient Greek figures among Ottoman readers was Aesop. Many literary adaptations of Aesop's fables were published in this period. Interest in Aesop's fables stemmed from the Ottoman focus on educating readers. The tremendous success of the translation of Fénelon's novel Les Aventures de Télémaque mentioned in Chapter 2 also related to the work's didactic

33 Yüksel, Türk Edebiyatında Yunan Antikitesi, 2-4; Budak, Münif Pasha, 289, 362-368, 397; see also: Okay, ‘Osmanlı Devleti’nin Yenileşme Döneminde Türk Edebiyatı.’
35 Published in the 1860s under the title ‘History of Greek Philosophers’ in Mecmua-i Fünun, volumes 13 to 45; see Strauss, ‘The Millets and the Ottoman Language,’ 217-219, 221; see also Memrutlu, ‘Multi-Perception of the Enlightenment Thinking in Nineteenth-Century Turkey,’ 177; and Yüksel, Türk Edebiyatında Yunan Antikitesi, 8.
36 Yüksel, Türk Edebiyatında Yunan Antikitesi, 2-4.
37 Has-er, ‘Tanzimat Devrinde Latin ve Grek Antikitesi ile İlgili Neşriyat,’ 100. This BA thesis is authoritative on the subject and is often quoted by scholars such as Toker, Türk Edebiyatında Nev Yunanılık; Demirci, ‘Mitoloji ve Şiir’in İzinde Ahmet Midhat Efendi’nin Mitolojiye Dair Görüşleri’; Yüksel, Türk Edebiyatında Yunan Antikitesi, 2-4, 18; and Budak, Münif Pasha, 289, 362-368, 397.
38 Strauss, ‘Who Read What in the Ottoman Empire (19th-20th Centuries)?’, 50.
qualities. The travels of Telemachus, son of Odysseus, were an education literally, and required reading in Ottoman schools.

The first translation of Télémaque into Ottoman Turkish (1859, printed in 1862) by the prominent statesman Grand Vizier Yusuf Kamil Pasha (1808-1876), was highly popular and influential among leading intellectuals. Yusuf Kamil Pasha’s Inşa translation of Fénelon’s novel – an ornate poetic prose style which dominated Ottoman literature at the time – was used in high school to teach prose composition.

A second translation by another distinguished figure in the political and cultural arena, Ahmed Vefik Pasha (1823-1891), completed in 1869 and printed in 1880, was also popular and reprinted more than once. In contrast to the ornate prose style of the previous translation, this version of Télémaque was characterized by its stylistic simplicity. The author believed he had produced ‘a literal and accurate’ work in which ‘every word would produce pleasure.’

Although Ancient philosophy played a major role in the Ottoman cultural world, Greek poetry and mythology were largely neglected. Apart from a few transpositions and adaptations into popular legend, Greco-Latin literature had no direct influence on Islamic or Turkish literature. When Yusuf Kamil Pasha’s Terceme-i Telemak appeared, it sparked a lively interest in Ancient Greek poetry and mythology which triggered translations of works on Ancient history into Ottoman Turkish.

Two other pioneering works also appeared in 1859: Terceme-i Manzume (Translations of verse), a selection of French poetry – La Fontaine, Lamartine, Gilbert and Racine – by the prominent intellectual Ibrahim Şinasi, and the famous Muhaverat-i Hikemiye (Philosophical dialogues) by Münif.

39 This work is considered to be the first translation from Western literature. Strauss notes, however, that the first Ottoman-Turkish translations of Western literature appeared in the 1830s in Egypt: Strauss, ‘Turkish Translations from Mehmed Ali’s Egypt.’
40 Enginün, Yeni Türk Edebiyatı, 177-179; Şemseddin Sami’s translation of Daniel Defoe’s Robinson Crusoe (often called the first modern English novel) in 1886 was also used in Ottoman schools; Strauss, ‘Who Read What in the Ottoman Empire (19th-20th Centuries)?’, 50.
41 Kamil, Tercüme-i Telemak. For biographical information, see: Inal, Osmanlı Devrinde Son Sadrazamlar.
42 Mardin, The Genesis of Young Ottoman Thought, 241-245. See also Chapter 2, above.
46 Tanpinar, Yahya Kemal, 119.
47 Toker, ‘Türk Edebiyatında Nev Yunanilik’; See also Meriç, Bu Ülke, 115; Tanpinar, XIX. Asır Türk Edebiyatı Tarihi, 38-40; Yüksel, Türk Edebiyatında Yunan Antikitesi, 1-3.
Paşa. These three volumes – strongly influenced by French literature – had a tremendous impact. They introduced new literary genres and set the tone for years to come with forms and ideas that shaped modern Turkish literature. Most of all, they ‘marked the awakening of interest in European classics.’

Knowledge of Greek Antiquity gradually increased and Classical authors became a point of reference in Ottoman literature. Classical authors came to influence and shape the ideas of the intelligentsia of the late Ottoman Empire.

As Western philosophy and Greek Classical works penetrated Ottoman literature, it might be true, as Mehmet Can Doğan remarks, that it was an interest in philosophy that directed and stimulated the attention of Ottoman intellectuals towards the Iliad and the Odyssey. Indeed, literary innovations and new perceptions of the Ancient world created a climate in which Classical poetry and mythology could enter Ottoman literature. At the same time, Greek mythology also emerged as a major inspiration in Ottoman painting and sculpture.

3 Mythology and Homer: Ottoman Reticence

According to Ancient tradition, the real originator of the Trojan War was the son of Priam, the king of the aforementioned city. When Paris was born, priests predicted that he would cause the downfall of his own country, whereupon Priam sent his own child to the mountains and left him with herdsmen. Paris grew up with the herdsmen in the mountains and became an excellent, brave man. Zeus or Jupiter, who according to Greek mythology was the ruler of the cosmos and the father of gods, goddesses and men, hosted a banquet one day and invited all gods and goddesses, except Eris, the goddess of strife. While the guests were enjoying themselves Eris came to the window, threw an apple into their midst, saying ‘for the most beautiful goddess.’ Because of this very apple of discord, which has been a saying ever since that time, the goddesses Hera, the wife

49 Yüksel, Türk Edebiyatında Yunan Antikitesi, 23.
51 Yüksel, Türk Edebiyatında Yunan Antikitesi, 2-4; Budak, Münif Pasha, 289, 362-368, 397; see also: Okay, ‘Osmanlı Devleti’nin Yenileşme Döneminde Türk Edebiyatı’; Ortaylı, İmparatorluğan En Uzun Yüzyıl, 244-254; Tanpınar, Edebiyat Dersleri, 59.
52 The use of the Roman names of mythological figures was more common in the Ottoman Empire, probably because of a better match with the Ottoman language, but also because of their popularity in Europe. See: Yüksel, Türk Edebiyatında Yunan Antikitesi, 62.
and sister of Zeus, Aphrodite, the goddess of love and affection, and Athena, the goddess of wisdom and intelligence, started to quarrel.

In order to settle their dispute, Zeus gave the apple to his helper, the god named Hermes, and sent him with the three goddesses to Paris. Following the order he received, Hermes handed the apple to Paris; Athena promised Paris intelligence and wisdom, Hera property and treasures, Aphrodite offered the most beautiful woman in the world. Preferring and accepting Aphrodite’s offer, Paris handed the apple to her. Because of this, Hera and Athena adopted the Greeks during the Trojan War, and Aphrodite the Trojans.

After a while Paris visited Menelaus, the king of Mycenae, and was treated with the utmost respect and veneration in his palace. Menelaus’ wife, named Helen, famous for her beauty and refinement, yielded to Aphrodite’s temptations and used the facilities she offered to elope with Paris. And so, Aphrodite fulfilled her promise and the prophecy of the priests came true. Paris’ betrayal of the respectful treatment and veneration increased the chill existing of old between the Greeks and the Trojans and led to a war.

Na’im Fraşeri, Ilyada. Eser-i Homer (İstanbul, 1303/1885-1886), preface, 1-6, translated from Ottoman Turkish

In his preface to the Iliad Fraşeri summarizes the mythological characters and events that led to the outbreak of the Trojan War. This account is rather unique, since Greek mythology, with its gods and goddesses, demigods and supernatural heroes, played no particular role in the usual interests of Ottoman intellectuals. Not that Turks were unfamiliar with epic narratives; indeed heroic epics are perhaps the oldest genre in Turkish literature. However, apart from exceptions such as Katip Çelebi’s Tarih-i Frengi, a seventeenth-century translation of the Chronique de Jean Carrion (Paris, 1548), Greek and Roman mythology was unknown in Ottoman literature until the second half of the nineteenth century. And this happened mainly through European literature inspired by the art and culture of Ancient Rome and Greece.

Educated Europeans had a special affection for Greece. Intellectual progress and the emergence of cultural nationalism, as well as the habit of seeing history as a linear advance of civilization and a superior European culture, all contributed towards the adulation of Homer in the nineteenth century. Schliemann’s excavations at Hisarlık, his discoveries

53 The author confuses Sparta with Mycenae.
54 Tökel, Divan Şiirinde Mitolojik Unsurlar.
55 Gökçe, ‘Yunan Mitolojisi ve Türk İslam Kültürü.’
and subsequent archaeological research made the Homeric world tangible and enabled this appropriation of Homer.

Homer became a source of both moral and political inspiration. Moreover, the rise of atheism and the scientific study of the Bible created a climate in which Homer and the Bible were seen in a common historical perspective. Greek Classical literature became a standard ingredient in European school programmes in the nineteenth century, with Homer as a fixed element in European education.56

Mythology, Islam and Eastern Literary Traditions
The principal reason why Ottoman intellectuals treated Homer’s pagan gods with circumspection – even in the enlightened late-nineteenth century – is closely connected with religion. Ottoman principles were incompatible with polytheism. Indeed, the long neglect of Greek literature, in contrast to Ancient philosophy, was essentially because Ancient mythology and Islam did not mix.57

Although there clearly was an interest in Homer and Homeric literature in the late nineteenth century, the number of Ottoman translations came to no more than a few attempts; no complete Turkish version of Homeric literature was produced in the Ottoman Empire. The discrepancy between Ancient mythology and Ottoman religious scruple made Muslim intellectuals in the late Ottoman Empire cautious and hesitant to use mythology as a source.

The Ottoman Muslim world’s intellectual dilemma, the contradiction between mythology and the religious truth of Islam, is similar to the clash of Homeric polytheism and Christianity in the first centuries of the Christian era. For many years Christian scholars tried to reconcile Homer’s pagan literature with the religious truth of the Gospel and attempted to emulate Homer in their religion. As Manguel explains, ‘For Christianity, the reading of the Ancient authors lent the new faith a prehistory and universality. For the Ancient world, it meant continuity and transmission of intellectual experience.’58

Şemseddin Sami’s search for an Ottoman equivalent for the term mythology is symbolic of the way in which the Ottomans approached this conflict. Şemseddin Sami was one of the first intellectuals to discuss mythology. In his work Esatir (1878), he explained that there is no equivalent for the word

56 Den Boer, ‘Homer in Modern Europe,’ in European Review.
57 Yüksek, Türk Edebiyatında Yunan Antikesi, 195; Enginün, Yeni Türk Edebiyatı, 266.
58 On Homer and the Christian world, see: Manguel, Homer’s The Iliad and The Odyssey, 60–68, 67.
mythology in Eastern languages. Taking the term *esatirül-evvelin* (tales of men of Ancient times) found in the verses of the Koran, he decided to use *esatir*. He emphasized the importance of knowing mythology, namely as a key to understanding Greek and Roman works and to comprehending Arabic scholarship.\(^59\) In effect, as Kreiser points out, *esatirül-evvelin* represented a condemned tradition at odds with the words of the prophet Mohammed.\(^60\)

Sami’s search for an acceptable term for mythology, his hesitant, circumspect explanations and his cautious terminology reveal the unease felt with the unconventional place mythology occupied in Ottoman intellectual life.\(^61\)

Without any previous literature about the pagan gods to rely on, Fraşeri had no works by predecessors on which to build. He commented on this neglect of Homer in the Islamic world. He noted that Muslims had their own Homer and Virgil, namely Iran’s Firdevsi and Nizami: ‘During the civilization of the Arabs, the Islamic community adopted some scientific writings from the Greeks, yet they did not favour Greek literature. This is why Islamic poets formed a separate caravan, in which the poets of Iran obtained a superior position.’\(^62\)

There is a sharp distinction between Western and Ottoman Muslim or Eastern literary tradition. Tanpınar drew attention to the difference by comparing the two major epics: the *Iliad* and Firdevsi’s *Şehname*. He explained that the composition of the *Şehname* is comparable to the mural reliefs at the Palace of Sargon II and Trajan’s column, while the *Iliad* is comparable to Classical Greek sculpture. As Tanpınar noted, ‘in the *Iliad*, the whole Greek world, including the cosmos, the gods, the lives, the works and arts of the Greeks and Greek civilization are gathered in the narrative of one event. The story of the *Iliad* is an entity; details are disregarded or ingeniously integrated in the whole. The *Şehname*, on the other hand, is a rectilinear narrative that treats every detail with the same precision.’\(^63\) This difference between the Western and Eastern traditions of composition was

---


\(^{60}\) Kreiser, ‘Troia und die Homerischen Epen,’ 285.

\(^{61}\) Along with Şemseddin Sami and Ahmet Midhat Efendi, more and more Ottoman intellectuals of the era started to defend the importance of mythology. Literary works with mythological topics became increasingly noticeable; see Kreiser, ‘Troia und die Homerischen Epen,’ 286; and Yüksel, *Türk Edebiyatında Yunan Antikitesi*, 103-112.


\(^{63}\) Tanpınar, *XIX. Asr Türk Edebiyatı Tarihi*, 41.
an additional obstacle to the introduction of Homeric epics in Ottoman literature.

Yet the way Homer was perceived in modern Europe also differed in particular national and cultural environments. As historian Pim den Boer has stated, ‘political groups and cultural affinities in national traditions’ lay at the root of these different approaches. He notes that while Plato played a key role for the German *Bildungsbürger,* while British Utilitarians, Social Darwinists and Late Victorians and Edwardians nurtured Homeric ideals. In France, on the other hand, Homer was never a core source of identification. Associated with a bygone aristocratic society, Homer was not adored in France as he was in Britain or Germany. While Greek was taught in French schools, it did not have the same status as it had in Germany or Britain.64

Since the French education system, French culture and literature were the dominant influence in the Ottoman Empire, presumably the Ottomans saw Homer from the French perspective, in which the identification with Homeric heroes was far less intense.

Another issue relates to the unsuitability of the Aruz metre of traditional Ottoman Divan poetry to the structure of Western poetry.65 Ottoman authors faced serious linguistic problems when translating verse into Aruz or sylabical verse.66 That explains why the attempts to translate the *Iliad* in the Ottoman era were in prose. Hilmi justified his use of prose by noting: ‘A translation in verse would corrupt the poetical quality of the story.’67

For all the linguistic and literary pitfalls and struggles, the reluctance to discuss mythology seems to have been the main reason why it took so long before Homer’s epics were translated. When Selanikli Hilmi made his translation of the first book of Homer’s *Iliad* almost ten years later, he was even more circumspect with mythological figures and events. Indeed, he avoided the word ‘mythology’ completely in the introduction to his translation. Moreover, he clearly worried about possible criticism of his work. While he emphasized the tremendous value of Homer and the *Iliad,* he did not feel confident about the reception his work would receive.68 At the same time, as Kreiser points out, we must bear in mind that this work

64 Den Boer, ‘Homer in Modern Europe,’ in *European Review,* 179.
65 Aruz is the primary prosodic metre used in Divan literature.
66 The difficulty of translating verse into Aruz was much discussed. Gradually a consensus was reached: it was better to render narrative and dramatic verse in prose; in Paker, ‘Turkey,’ 20, 28. See also: Yüksel, *Türk Edebiyatında Yunan Antikitesi,* 49. On the complexities of Aruz, see also: Fraşeri, *Ilyada,* 10-12.
67 Hilmi, *Ilyas yahud şair-i şehir Omiros.*
68 Hilmi, *Ilyas yahud şair-i şehir Omiros.*
was published shortly after the Greco-Ottoman War of 1897. His hesitation may also have related to the current climate.

Although both were ambitious and enthusiastic at the start, neither Fraşeri nor Selanikli Hilmi finished their work. They were in uncharted territory. As pioneers they doubtless experienced all the complexities involved. While Fraşeri chose to fill the gap and introduced, discussed and explained the gods, their actions and characteristics and their role in Homeric literature, Hilmi decided either to ignore them or to treat them as real figures.

His translation includes many inaccuracies. Besides ignoring the role of Aphrodite and many other gods and goddesses, he often confused the names of Homer’s heroes. Furthermore, he placed Troy in the province of Izmir and stated that Paris stayed at Agamemnon’s palace rather than with Menelaus.

In addition to his reluctance to deal with mythology, it was perhaps his awareness of his own shortcomings that led him to take an apologetic tone: ‘I, a humble translator, had a strong desire to translate this story. [...] Hey, it is no shame!’

4 Homer and Troy in Ottoman Essays, Books, Plays and the First Translations (1884-1908)

The highly valued poet [...] expressed his people’s sincerity and etiquette, customs and morality, all conditions and behaviours of men and women, of the rich and the poor. Taking an impartial look at Homer, we can say that Homer is a poet, a chronicler, a philosopher, a geographer, [...] a satirist.

Kevkebü’l Ulum, 1, 16/R/1302 (3 January 1885), translated from Ottoman Turkish

With its heroic narration of ten years of siege and dispute, and the full explanation of situations connected with them, the Iliad is a most sublime and excellent product of poetical imagination, well-arranged and decorated. The Iliad is a reflection of a manifest patriotism and defence of honesty.

Na’ım Fraşeri, Ilyada. Eser-i Homer (Istanbul, 1303/1885-1886), preface, 1-6, translated from Ottoman Turkish

---

69 For a recent study in the Greco-Ottoman War of 1897, see Ekinci, The Origins of the 1897 Ottoman-Greek War.
71 Fraşeri completed an Albanian version of the Iliad in 1896: Iliadh‘e Omirit (Bucharest, 1896).
72 Hilmi, Ilyas yahud şâir-i şehîr Omiros.
Na'im Fraşeri (1846-1900) was born to an Albanian Muslim landowning family from Frasher in southern Albania. Like other children of affluent Muslim families of the region, Fraşeri went to the famous Greek Gymnasium, Zossimea, in Ioannina, now in Greece. There he learned Ancient and Modern Greek, French and Italian. At home he spoke Albanian and Turkish and in addition he learned Arabic and Persian through private lessons. After graduating he moved to Istanbul and rose to a prominent position in the Ottoman bureaucracy. He served as a member and chairman of the Committee of Inspection and Examination (Encümeni Teftiş ve Muayene) under the Ministry of Public Instruction. The committee was responsible for censoring books and magazines before printing. He died and was buried in Istanbul in 1900.

In the fifteen-page preface to his 43-page prose translation Na'im Fraşeri highlighted his own pioneering role. He was the first to translate the *Iliad*, explaining that there had as yet been no Ottoman Turkish translation of either the *Iliad* or the *Odyssey*. However, the former minister of education and leading proponent of Turkey’s humanist politics in the 1930s and 1940s Hasan Ali Yücel argued later that it was the Ottoman diplomat Sadullah

73 Na'im Fraşeri and his brothers Şemseddin Sami (1850-1904) and Abdil Fraşeri (1839-1892) were all Ottoman bureaucrats and members of the intellectual scene of the period. The Albanian Muslim community of the Ioannina region were strongly committed to the multicultural Ottoman Empire, and at the same time they felt a patriotic devotion to Albania. Istanbul was the influential metropolitan cultural centre for Albanian leaders in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. The dual loyalty of Albanians was not exceptional ‘in the multinational Ottoman Empire with its multiple layers of self-consciousness, identity and loyalty’ at the turn of the century. The nationalist policies introduced by the Young Turks in 1909 led to revolts and finally the declaration of the Albanian independence in 1912. See: Gawrych, ‘Tolerant Dimensions of Cultural Pluralism in the Ottoman Empire,’ 519, 521; and Trix, ‘The Stamboul Alphabet of Shemseddin Sami Bey,’ 264, 269.


75 For biographical information on Na'im Fraşeri, see: Tahir, *Osmanlı Müellifleri*, 469. Bursalı Mehmed Tahir claims that Naim Fraşeri died in 1896. See also: Levend, *Şemsettin Sami*, 46; and Yüksel, *Türk Edebiyatında Yunan Antikitesi*, 229-231.


Pasha (1839-1890) who actually deserved to be called the first translator of the *Iliad* into Turkish. Sadullah Pasha translated ten couplets into two rhyming verses and a section in prose. Yücel cited the ten couplets in his *Edebiyat Tarihimizden* (From the history of our literature).78 However, Sadullah Pasha’s translation had never been published, which makes a final statement on the matter impossible. As Klaus Kreiser rightly argues, Na’im Fraşeri’s printed work should be regarded as the first translation of Homer’s *Iliad*.79

An article published on 2 February 1885 supports Kreiser’s conclusion. The anonymous author hoped that soon the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* will be translated into Turkish, so that we will not have to go without Homer’s work any longer. Before this first translation of the *Iliad* appeared, Ottoman-Turkish readers might broaden their knowledge of Homer through articles in periodicals. Between December 1884 and March 1885, for instance, three extensive articles appeared in the periodical *Kevkebü'l Ulum*, including a biography of Homer, an introduction to his poems and a summary of the books of the *Iliad* (Fig. 32).80

Almost a decade earlier a play inspired by the *Odyssey* had been produced by Ali Haydar (1836-1914). The verse comedy *Rüya Oyunu*, published in 1876/1877, was about a dream of Bey (Lord) of the nymph Calypso. While Bey believed himself to be in love with Calypso, the nymph was infatuated with Odysseus and waiting for his return. She told Bey that Odysseus had sailed away with Mentes and Telemachus. Although she could have stopped Odysseus, her love had prevented her. At the end of the play, Bey wakes up and writes down his dream to send it to an interpreter.81

Gradually Homer became a key point of reference in Ottoman literature. Ahmet Midhat Efendi, for instance, discussed Homer and his epics in his analysis of the birth of the novel in his work *Ahbar-i Asara Tamim-i Enzar* (Literary works: An overview, 1890).82 Discussing Herodotus’ historiography, he described the transformation of ideas in Ancient Greece between the period of Homer and Herodotus, making an interesting connection between

78 Yücel, *Edebiyat Tarihimizden*, 297.
79 Kreiser, ‘Troia und die Homerischen Epen.’
80 *Kevkebü'l Ulum*, 01/Ra/1302 (19 December 1884), 59-65; 16/Ra/1302 (3 January 1885), 93-97 and 16/R/1302 (2 February 1885), 159-161.
Ancient Greek literary developments and contemporary Ottoman literary issues. In the period between Homer and Herodotus, Midhat Efendi explained, ‘the ideas and perspectives of the Greeks’ gradually changed, and in the end ‘gods and goddesses, half heavenly and half earthly heroes’ went ‘out of fashion.’ The followers of Homer and Hesiod, moreover, were mere imitators and never able to reach the level of their masters. Herodotus, on the other hand, represented new ideas and perspectives.\(^8\)

In ‘Mitoloji ve Şiir’ (Mythology and poetry), an essay published in 1890 in Tercüman-ı Hakikat, Ahmet Midhat Efendi returned to the subject of mythology and the role of Homer. He argued that mythological figures had once been real people, but had been absorbed into fiction through the work of Homer and his followers.\(^8\)

In 1881, in the introductory remarks to one of his plays, Namık Kemal (1840-1888), a leading figure in New Ottoman Literature who lived in Gallipoli (Dardanelles) during a period of exile in 1872, emphasized the strong influence of Homeric poems on Greek tragedy and the sculptures of the great Phidias.\(^8\)

Homer and the Iliad also received attention in a treatise on Troy published in the third volume of Kamus ül-Alâm (Dictionary of universal history and geography, 1891), written by Na'im Fraşeri’s brother Şemseddin Sami Fraşeri (1850-1904).\(^8\) Published between 1889 and 1899, this massive six-volume encyclopaedia dealing with important Ottoman and Islamic themes,


84 Mithat Efendi, ‘Mitoloji ve Şiir.’ For an analysis of Ahmet Midhat Efendi’s thoughts on mythology, see: Demirci, ‘Mitoloji ve Şiir’in ızinde Ahmet Midhat Efendi’nin Mitolojiye dairGORÜSLERİ,’ 103-121.

85 Kreiser, ‘Troia und die Homerischen Epen,’ 284; the introductory remarks appear in Namik Kemal’s Mukaddeme-i Celal (İstanbul, 1888); See also: Kaplan, Enginuin and Emin, Yeni Türk Edebiyatı Antolojisi, 356. For biographical notes on Namik Kemal and his literary production and ideas, see: Tanpınar, XIX. Asır Türk Edebiyatı Tarihi, 312-400; on Greek tragedy in Ottoman literature, see: Yüksel, Türk Edebiyatında Yunan Antikitesi, 137-166.

86 Sami, Kamus-ül Alâm. In the second half of the twentieth century the Albanian government claimed the remains of the Fraşeri brothers, who had all died in Istanbul. The Turkish government refused to send the remains of Şemseddin Sami, because of his quintessential role in the Turkish language and culture, yet concerning Na’im and Abdil Fraşeri the Turks came round in the end and sent their remains to Albania. See Trix, ‘The Stamboul Alphabet of Shemseddin Sami Bey,’ 269.
personalities and countries as well as Western history and geography is a work of an exceptional calibre. As the author explained in his introduction, an encyclopaedia on current world history and geography was much needed in the Empire, since these disciplines were essential for the development of civilization. Rather than translate a Western encyclopaedia into Ottoman Turkish, since Western encyclopaedias focused on European issues and would therefore be incomplete, Kamus ül-Alâm brought Western and Eastern history and geography together.87

The article on Troy outlined contemporary knowledge of Troy in the Ottoman Empire (Fig. 4), giving a history of Troy, a chronological list of Trojan rulers, the Trojan War, and archaeological developments in the region. Emphasis was placed on the location of the site being on Ottoman soil, mentioning both Greek and Ottoman designations: ‘Truva or Troya, situated in the north-western part of Asia Minor, nowadays within the Province of Biga’; ‘at the western foot of Mount Ida (that is to say Kaz) and along the river Xanti’88 (that is to say Menderes).89

A second translation by Selanikli Hilmi of the first song of the Iliad from the Greek into Ottoman Turkish appeared in 1898 or 1899: Ilyas yahud şâîr-i şehîr Omiros (The Iliad of the celebrated poet Homer).90 While little is known about the author, the title page states that he was a member of the Committee of Inspection and Examination (Encûmeni Teftiş ve Muayene), and so an Ottoman bureaucrat like Na’im Fraşeri. Hilmi’s 61-page translation includes a fifteen-page introduction and the first book of the Iliad in two chapters: the first chapter (26 pages) is called ‘Wrath! Violence!’ and the second chapter (20 pages) is called ‘Departure!’91 Compared to Fraşeri’s translation Hilmi’s work is unornamental, plain and almost completely stripped of the original epithets describing the Homeric figures. As a result, Hilmi’s own interpretation dominates; by contrast, Fraşeri was more successful in relating the original story.92

87 Sami, Kamus ül-Alâm, 14-16; Gawrych, ‘Tolerant Dimensions of Cultural Pluralism in the Ottoman Empire.’
88 According to Homer, Scamander was called Xanthus by the gods and Scamander by men. The inhabitants of Xanthus in Asia were called Xanthis, in Lemprière, Bibliotheca Classica, 1533, and in De Roy van Zuydewijn, Homerus Ilias, 77, 423.
89 Samî, Kamus-ül Alâm, 1647.
90 Hilmi, Ilyas yahud şâîr-i şehîr Omiros.
91 Hilmi, Ilyas yahud şâîr-i şehîr Omiros, 1, 27.
92 Text analysis is not the purpose of this survey; the main focus is to trace, select and interpret significant information concerning the reception of Homer in, for instance, literary texts.
Despite the limitations of Hilmi’s translation,93 the work made an impact in literary circles. The leading intellectual of the time, Yahya Kemal Beyath, who initiated the neo-Hellenist movement in the early twentieth century together with his contemporary Yakub Kadri Karaosmanoğlu,94 expressed his high regard for Selanikli Hilmi’s translation, noting that he had been ‘tremendously touched’ by the work. He had assumed that ‘a Greek had produced the translation,’ but ‘after a long time [...] I understood that what I had been reading at that time was an incomplete Turkish translation of Homer’s Iliad.’95

5 Admiration for the ‘Lord of Poets’

The aforementioned writer [Homer] and the great works the Iliad and the Odyssey are most repeatedly recited by respectful learned literary figures. This is why Homer is correctly remembered by his byname the Lord of Poets. Kevkeb’ül Ulum, 01/Ra/1302 (19 December 1884), translated from Ottoman Turkish

Ottoman intellectuals evidently recognized the importance of Homer and were above all aware of the extraordinary position of the Iliad and the Odyssey in the history of literature. Fraşeri emphasized Homer’s exceptional influence on later literary figures of various backgrounds in the preface to his translation. He informed Ottoman-Turkish readers that Homer’s works were a ‘breeding ground’ not only for Ancient Greeks, but for Romans and subsequent European writers and poets as well. ‘Famous poets such as Hesiod, Aeschylus, Euripides, Sophocles and the writer of comedies Aristophanes were all guided by Homer and tragedians in particular quoted the Iliad and the Odyssey intensively.’ Commenting on the Romans, he stated that they ‘followed the Greeks in all fields, and therefore in literature as well. [...] Virgil deserves to be called the Homer of the Romans. His work the Aeneid is like a continuation of the Iliad and the Odyssey.’ He drew attention to literary figures such as ‘Horace, Tasso, Dante, Milton and the rest of old

93 Criticism of the title Ilias, veiled mythological figures, ignoring or confusing chief characters such as Agamemnon and Menelaus, or incorrect topographic information such as situating Troy in Izmir province instead of Biga. See Sevük, Avrupa Edebiyatı ve Biz, 65; and Yüksel, Türk Edebiyatında Yunan Antikitesi, 55-72.
94 On the neo-Hellenist movement in the Ottoman Empire, see: Ayvazoğlu, Yahya Kemal; Karaosmanoğlu, Gençlik ve Edebiyat Hatıraları; Tevfik, Esâtir-i Yunâniyan; Ayvazoğlu, ‘Neo-Hellenism in Turkey.’
95 Beyath, Çocukluğam, 100; Yüksel, Türk Edebiyatında Yunan Antikitesi, 55.
and new European poets forming a caravan by following the preceding.' And, Fraşeri concluded, ‘the leader of the caravan is Homer.’

Selanikli Hilmi’s account of how Homer was received is even more sumptuous. He paid a glowing tribute to Homer as a poet ‘who nourished the creation of art,’ praising the Iliad as a source of inspiration ‘for poets with the most venerable minds.’ Emphasizing the respect of esteemed literary figures for the Iliad, he quoted Shakespeare and Rousseau as well as noting the tremendous appreciation Homer enjoyed among Ancient philosophers such as Aristotle.

Both Fraşeri and Selanikli Hilmi mention Alexander the Great’s high regard for Homer. Legends about Alexander or Iskender are well-known in the Muslim world; Alexander the Great was held high esteem in Ottoman culture. Sultan Mehmed II’s identification with Alexander is a case in point. In line with this appropriation of Alexander, Fraşeri underscored that Alexander the Great was not a Greek, ‘but a foreigner’ to the Greeks.

To show Alexander’s deep admiration for the Iliad, Hilmi refers to Plutarch’s description of Alexander’s encounter with the Persian king Darius III in his Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans. After defeating the Persians, ‘Alexander was presented a valuable desk of Darius as a present of the victory, to which, to mark his esteem, he uttered “I am even more happy with this present than the victory, since I very much needed such a precious attribute to store the book of the Iliad of the beloved poet Homer.”’

Having discussed Alexander’s admiration for Homer at length, both translators turned to The Adventures of Telemachus. This is hardly surprising given the story’s popularity among Ottoman Turks. Fraşeri pointed out that ‘Fénelon’s book The Adventures of Telemachus is an addendum to

96 Fraşeri, Ilyada, 10-14.
97 Hilmi, Iyas yahud şâir-i şehîr Omiros.
98 For a comprehensive survey of views about Alexander the Great in the Islamic world, see: Zuwiyya, Islamic Legends Concerning Alexander the Great.
99 The Iskendername (The book of Alexander) is one of the earliest surviving illustrated Ottoman manuscripts. Written by the poet Ahmedi in the fourteenth century, it tells about the heroic deeds and conquests of Alexander the Great. The epic poem plays a key role in Turkish culture. It also deals with geographical, theological, philosophical and historical matters and forms an early source for Ottoman history; see Unver, Ahmedi-Iskendername; Sawyer, ‘Alexander, History, and Piety’; and Akdoğan, Iskendername’den Seçmeler.
100 On Sultan Mehmed II’s identification with Alexander the Great, see: Babinger, Fatih Sultan Mehmed ve Zamani, 351-353; Janssens and Van Deun, ‘George Amiroutzes and his Poetical Oeuvre’; Reinsch, Critobuli Imbriotae historiae; and Kritovoulos, History of Mehmed the Conqueror.
101 Fraşeri, Ilyada, 10.
102 Plutarch, Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans.
103 Hilmi, Iyas yahud şâir-i şehîr Omiros.
the *Odyssey*.’ Selanikli Hilmi praised Homer and suggested that Ottoman Turkish readers compare ‘the celebrated story Telemachus of Fénelon with the Iliad.’ Hilmi noted that ‘the comparison of these two works will give one the opportunity to appoint the difference between fantasy and reality,’ since Telemachus is ‘regarded as poetical imagination’ and Homer ‘describes an event by giving ethics, customs and beliefs a central position.’

The relation between the *Odyssey* and *The Adventures of Telemachus* was also remarked on in the periodical *Kevkeb’ül Ulum*. Readers were informed that many of the episodes in the story of Telemachus had their origins in ‘the *Odyssey*, the story of Ulysses’ return journey to his home island.’

In addition to the two major Homeric works, other poems attributed to Homer were also discussed: ‘According to Aristotle, Homer wrote other poems as well. As a matter of fact, one of them was called Margites.’ Fraşeri, however, believed that Homer was much too brilliant to be the author of other poems, such as *The Battle of Frogs and Mice*. ‘It is clear that,’ he states, ‘Homer who was used to invent and arrange important events, would never deign to write about such inferior matters. Therefore, there is no question about it that the aforementioned work is no more than an imitation.’

Fraşeri noted that ‘until now no other poet in the world had reached the level of Homer. He will always be the father of the poetry and the leader of the poets and the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* will always be distinguished among the rest of the verses.’ And *Kevkeb’ül Ulum* commented: ‘No poet has ever been able to match him.’

**Preference for the *Iliad***

Troy was situated near Çanakkale. Although in the past Troy and both its siege and the war were considered to exist only in the imagination, the excavations in the surroundings have confirmed and strengthened the contents of the *Iliad*.

*Na’im Fraşeri, Ilyada. Eser-i Homer (Istanbul, 1303/1885-1886), preface, 7, translated from Ottoman Turkish*

The city of Troy or Ilion, with strong and solid city walls, strengthened with many fortifications on the Asian shore [must be in the direction of the province of

---

104 Fraşeri, *Ilyada*, 12; Hilmi, *İlyas yahud şâir-i şehir Omiros*.
107 *Kevkeb’ül Ulum*, 16/R/1302 (2 February 1885).
Izmir. Although history has not yet settled this issue, the natural requirements of the region have confirmed our idea. 
Selanikli Hilmi, Ilyas yahud şair-i şehir Omiros (İstanbul, 1316/1898-1899), introduction, zel, translated from Ottoman Turkish

The first Ottoman translations of Homeric literature concentrated on the *Iliad*. The excavations in Troy and the public interest this generated encouraged this bias. Both Fraşeri and Hilmi drew attention to the geographical location of Troy. Fraşeri also offered a brief account of the archaeological research at the site. In the 1890s, newspapers and periodicals began to pay increasing attention to the excavations at Troy, which ‘had become famous thanks to Homer’s epic.”

As articles published in *Ikdam* and *Servet-i Fünun* show, Ottoman readers were well-informed about the excavations at Troy, not to mention issues such as the scholarly debate about the correct site (Ballı Dağ or Hisarlık), the prominent role of Frank Calvert and the latest archaeological research and results. Besides informative texts, the press also reported on visitors to the site and their background. This shows a close involvement with the actual site of Troy, as discussed in the next chapter.

Besides a deep admiration for Homer and a preference for the *Iliad*, literary texts also provided biographical notes on Homer. Here an explicit connection was made between the celebrated poet and the city of Izmir.

6 Izmir (Smyrna): Homer’s Hometown

Like many famous figures of Antiquity, Homer, too, was an illegitimate child. Because Cretheis, the daughter of Melanopus, gave birth to him on the banks of the River Meles in the vicinity of Izmir, she named him Melesigenes, which means ‘Child of the River Meles.’

Kevkeb’ül Ulum, 01/Ra/1302 (19 December 1884), translated from Ottoman Turkish

Although his nationality, his time and his life story are veiled in mystery and ambiguity, there is a strong possibility that he was born ten centuries before Christ and two centuries after the Trojan war. His birthplace is the city of Izmir, his mother’s name is Cretheis and his father is unknown. He got his byname ‘Son

109 *Ikdam*, 19/Ş/1310 (8 March 1893); *Ikdam*, 3 Kanun-i-evvel 1313 (15 December 1897); *Servet-i Fünun*, 26, 25 Mart 1320 (7th April 1904).
of Meles’ because he was born on the banks of the River Meles, which at that time ran near Izmir.

Na‘ım Fraséri, Ilyada. Eser-i Homer (Istanbul, 1303/1885-1886), preface, 7-9, translated from Ottoman Turkish

Where Homer was born has been much disputed. Seven cities claim to be his place of birth: Smyrna, Chios, Colophon, Salamis, Rhodes, Argos and Athens. Nineteenth-century scholarship favoured Smyrna as Homer’s native city. The biographical information in Kevkeb’ûl Ulum and Fraséri’s preface both emphasize this possibility by referring to the legend that Homer’s name was Melesigenes. In fact, they seemed quite convinced that ‘their’ eminent city of Izmir was where Homer came into the world. In all probability, the writers based their knowledge on previous biographies, particularly the Life of Homer by Pseudo-Herodotus, which declares Smyrna to be the birthplace of Homer and states that he was born 168 years after the Trojan War.

The biography of Homer in the Kevkeb’ûl Ulum essay is quite detailed and focuses particularly on geographical aspects. It is generally assumed that Ottoman intellectuals were conversant with Classical Greek geography. In their translations of Ancient texts and other literary works, they usually marked the Classical sites within the Ottoman Empire.

The author of the essay tells about Homer’s childhood, his teacher’s prediction of a bright future, Mentes’ (chief of the Taphians in the Odyssey) invitation to travel with him by sea, his long journeys and visits to various places (locations in the Odyssey), how he researched as he travelled and composed poems based on his observations, how he went blind at Colophon, Mentor’s care for him and how he got the name Homer in Cyme. On this point the author states that the blind Melesigenes went to Cyme to work as a bard and soon became well-known in the city. The senate was advised to take care of the blind poet, since his songs would bring great fame to the city. Yet one of the senators objected and apparently said: ‘If we are going to give every blind person we met a salary, soon we will carry a convoy of the blind on our shoulders. [...] From then on,’ the author resumes, ‘the name Melesigenes disappeared and Homer, which means blind, replaced

110 Von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, Die Ilias und Homer, 372. See also Latacz, Homer, 25-27.
111 In this biography of Homer many episodes and figures of the Odyssey are incorporated in Homer’s life, see: Manguel, Homer’s The Iliad and The Odyssey, 29-32; and also Herodotus, Vie d’Homère. For the various Homer Vitae see also: Latacz, Homer, 23-30.
112 Yüksel, Türk Edebiyatında Yunan Antikitesi, 40.
it. Subsequently, the blind poet cursed Cyme and left for Phocaea. There, too, he was dogged by misfortune.

The article goes on to discuss Homer’s struggle with Thestorides, who recorded Homer’s poems in exchange for bed and board and left for Chios. He persuaded people that the poems were his own and became famous on the island. Homer followed the ‘thief’ to Chios, but Thestorides ‘ran off.’ Regarding Homer’s final years, the author remarks that he had a pleasant life in Chios and that eventually he was much beloved everywhere in Greece. Homer fell ill while at Ios, travelling from Samos to Athens, and finally died.¹¹³

Fraşeri concentrated on the ‘Homeric question’ after an introduction about Homer’s mother, his education and the composition of the Iliad and the Odyssey. He reviewed the fierce debates of contemporary scholars concerning Homer’s identity, which of the epics may have been composed by Homer, and the historicity of the Iliad. Questions that occupied the minds of Homeric scholars in the nineteenth century included: Who was this influential poet Homer? Where did he come from? Was he alone? How many poets where involved in creating the poems? Was the Iliad based on a historical conflict, or was it only a product of the human imagination?¹¹⁴

Taking all views into consideration, Fraşeri concluded that Homer must have been a real person, a single poet who composed the Iliad and the Odyssey by himself. He emphasized that although ‘the life story and the conditions of the poet of the Iliad and the Odyssey may be veiled, his existence could never be denied.’ Fraşeri concluded in his introduction that ‘it is not the name of Homer that gave the abovementioned famous works their reputation and fame; quite the reverse, the works made the author famous. Therefore, Homer is the Iliad and the Odyssey.’¹¹⁵

¹¹³ *Kevkeb‘ül Ulum*, 01/Ra/1302 (19 December 1884).
¹¹⁴ For an overview of the results of Homeric scholarship in this time, see: Latacz, *Homer*, particularly 23-30. On the historicity of Homer, Troy and the Trojan War see also: Latacz, *Troy and Homer*; and Wood, *In Search of the Trojan War*. For a modern thesis that Homer never even existed, see West, ‘The Invention of Homer.’
Figure 30  Homer’s *Iliad* from Mehmed II’s library

Source: Topkapı Sarayı Museum collection, Istanbul, Gl2
Photo: Topkapı Sarayı Museum Istanbul, 2012

Figure 31  Selanikli Hilmi, *Ilyas yahud şâir-i şehir Omiros* [The *Iliad* of the celebrated poet Homer] (Istanbul, 1898 or 1899)

Source: Kelder, Uslu and Şerifoğlu, *Troy: City, Homer and Turkey*

Hilmi made the second Ottoman-Turkish translation of the first book of the *Iliad*. Little is known about the translator; the frontispiece states that he was a civil servant at the Ministry of Public Instruction. Hilmi’s translation runs to 61 pages and includes an introduction of fifteen pages and the first book of the *Iliad* in two chapters.
Before the publication of the first translation of the *Iliad*, Ottoman-Turkish readers could learn about Homer from periodicals. Three extensive articles appeared between December 1884 and March 1885 in *Kevkebü'l Ulum*, including a biography of Homer, an introduction to his works and a summary of the *Iliad*. 

Source: *Kevkebü'l Ulum*, 3 January 1885, p. 93, in Kelder, Uslu and Şerifoğlu, *Troy: City, Homer and Turkey*
This six-volume encyclopaedia published between 1889 and 1899 is an exceptional work on major Ottoman and Islamic themes, personalities and countries, as well as Western history and geography. The essay on Troy provides a summary of contemporary knowledge of Troy in the Ottoman Empire: a history of Troy, a chronological list of rulers, the Trojan War and archaeological developments in the region. Special attention is paid to Troy’s location on Ottoman soil.
Figure 34  Construction of the new building of the Imperial Museum (1891)

Source: Cezar, Sanatta Batıya Açılış ve Osman Hamdi