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Translation of Scientific Texts into Ottoman Turkish in the Early Modern Era

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Throughout their six-century-long history, the Ottomans experienced two movements of translation: the first started in their early days and continued during the classical age (1300-1600). The second movement occurred during the modernization era until the end of the Ottoman rule. Both movements were mainly conducted by Ottoman scholars relying on their knowledge of languages. In the classical period, the Ottoman ulema were well-versed in three languages, *Elsine-i Selase*, i.e., Arabic, Turkish, and Persian. When it came to translation among these three languages, it was a smooth practice for them. In Ottoman madrasas, academic teaching focused on the Arabic language and rhetoric. Turkish was not part of the official instruction. Nonetheless, due to cohabitation among Turkish madrasa teachers and Turkish officials with Muslim Bosnians, Albanians, and other Muslims of Rumelia, the Turkish language spread among young madrasa graduates. The third language of *Elsine-i Selase*, i.e., Persian, was taught as a free course at the madrasas for any interested students. One way students studied Persian was by memorizing didactic poems in verse and then for those who liked to carry on further, they would read the poetry of the Great Persian Poets such as Hafez, Sa'di, Attar, and Jalal al-Din Rumi.

There was no urge to develop interest among the Ottoman ulema to learn European languages, partly because the scientific and scholarly legacy the Ottomans had inherited from the Seljukid and pre-Ottoman period was sufficient. The answers to the kinds of questions they had existed within the traditional Ottoman scientific learning. By contrast, during the early 17th century modernization period, when interest in European science grew, one of the significant challenges Ottoman scholars faced in the early years of modernization was how to learn European languages.

This plenary session will attempt to shed light on different aspects and ways this tradition was conducted. Ekmeleddin İhsanoğlu will present an analytical overview of this process by touching upon pivotal intellectuals and works spanning from 14th to 18th centuries. His analysis will pave the way for two other speakers' presentations.

Tunç Şen will explore the role of "mülazims"—recent madrasa graduates or newly dismissed scholarly office-holders awaiting new appointments within the scholarly and judicial bureaucracy of the Empire—in translating Arabic and Persian scientific treatises into Ottoman Turkish in early modern times. By examining a broad range of translated works across diverse scientific disciplines, from medicine and ethics to astral sciences and others, he will investigate the motivations behind these translations, as well as their short- and long-term consequences.

Kaan Üçsu will investigate the translation activities that arose from the Ottomans' intensifying engagement with European science in the seventeenth century. Focusing on three pioneering intellectuals—Kâtip Çelebi, Hezarfen Hüseyin Efendi, and Ebu Bekir bin Behram ed-Dimaşkî—he will examine how translation functioned as a medium for transmitting, adapting, and reinterpreting scientific knowledge. By analyzing, in particular, Ebu Bekir Efendi's Ottoman rendering of Joan Blaeu's lavish *Atlas Maior*, he will explore the connections among these intellectuals, the motivations behind their work, their translation practices, and the role these efforts played in shaping Ottoman understandings of geography and science.

Short Biography

Keywords

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