



Herodotus in Turkish: A Preliminary Study on Herodotean Scholarship

Türkçede Herodotos: Herodotos Araştırmaları Üzerine Bir Ön Çalışma

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ABSTRACT

Herodotus is widely known in Turkish intellectual circles. Despite its superficiality, his is a very familiar name even for those with a high school degree, and anyone curious about him can benefit from the translations of his work that are available to the Turkish audience. Herodotus has been a common point of reference in the works of Turkish ancient historians and others who deal with that period, but works devoted to the critical assessment of the historian had been very scarce until recently. This picture of scarcity changed over the past decades as more and more studies in Turkish delved into Herodotus and his work. This paper aims to evaluate the recent Herodotean scholarship in Turkey, as well as to attempt to illustrate the tendencies of Turkish ancient historians who are interested in this subject. In this way, perhaps one can also understand the motives and habits of Turkish scholarship on Herodotus and his work, which are undoubtedly indispensable for the ancient history of Turkey.

Keywords: Ancient Greek Historiography, Herodotus, Classical Reception Studies, History Of Classical Scholarship, Herodotean Scholarship

Öz

Herodotos Türk entelektüel camiasında gayet bilinen bir figürdür, hatta yüzeysel düzeyde de olsa, Herodotos toplumun sıradan kesimleri için dahi tanıdık bir isimdir ve Herodotos'u merak eden herkes, eserinin çeşitli Türkçe çevirileri sayesinde bu merakını giderebilir. Herodotos Türk eskiçağ tarihçilerinin ve mevzubahis döneme ilgi gösterenlerin eserlerinde sık sık başvurulan bir tarihtir fakat onu ve eserini eleştiriye tabi tutan çalışmaların sayısı yakın dönemlere kadar çok azdır. Bu genel tablo ise son yıllarda Herodotos ve eserine dair Türkçe yayımlanan çalışmalar neticesinde yavaş yavaş değişmektedir. Bu yazı Türkçede Herodotos üzerine yapılan çalışmaları değerlendirmeyi ve özellikle konuya ilgi gösteren Türk eskiçağ tarihçilerinin eğilimlerini göstermeyi amaçlamaktadır. Belki bu şekilde, eseri Türkiye'nin tarihi için vazgeçilmez nitelikteki Herodotos üzerine Türkçe literatürde yapılan çalışmaların sebeplerini ve genel niteliklerini de anlayabiliriz.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Eski Yunan Tarihyazımı, Herodotos, Klasiklerin Alımlanışı, Klasik Bilim Çalışmaları Tarihi, Herodotos Çalışmaları



Introduction

Interest in the classical world in Turkey is relatively recent. The origin of this interest can be seen in relation to the Westernization efforts of the Ottoman Sultans and intellectuals, which started in the late 18th century and culminated especially in the 19th century with the beginning of the era known as the Tanzimat, a period of reform. This period was marked by Ottoman political reforms but was also significant in terms of intellectual life in the empire because of a revived curiosity about Western literature, one which gradually increased as many men of letters in the empire started to visit Western capitals such as Paris, sometimes even spending much of their lives in exile in those places. After the Republican revolution, the young Turkish state turned its face to the West and great works of Western literature were translated into Turkish in accordance with the Westernization efforts. In the 1940s, Hasan Ali Yücel, the Minister of Education at the time, set up a translation bureau which in less than a decade managed to translate 83 volumes of Greek and Latin classics alongside several hundreds of translations of modern classics from around the world.¹ Furthermore, departments of classical philology and ancient history were established in Istanbul and Ankara Universities, which also accelerated the study of the classics, and approximately 80 years after these first seeds sprouted, I can now firmly state the importance of the works of classical antiquity is understood by a wide audience.

Some figures from antiquity have achieved particular fame, with Herodotus possibly having become the most famous of the ancient historians. He is widely known in Turkish intellectual circles, and despite its superficiality, his is a very familiar name even for the general public, with anyone who is curious about him being able to benefit from the translations of his work that are available to the Turkish audience. Herodotus has been a common point of reference in the works of Turkish ancient historians and those dealing with the relevant period; however, works devoted to the critical assessment of the historian had been very scarce until recently. This picture has changed in the past decades as more and more studies in Turkish began delving into Herodotus and his work. This paper aims to evaluate the recent progress in Herodotean scholarship in Turkey, as well as to attempt to illustrate the tendencies of Turkish ancient historians who are interested in this subject. In this way, perhaps one might also understand the motives and habits of Turkish scholarship on Herodotus and his work, which are undoubtedly indispensable for the ancient history of Turkey.

Herodotus in Ottoman Turkey

The use of Herodotus as a source appears to have started very early, with the name of Herodotus first being seen in an Ottoman Turkish work written in the 1730s. This work was devoted to the history of Athens from earlier times to the present. The work's author was

1 For this number see the table on Korucu 2007, p. 192.

Mahmud Efendi, who had served as a local qadi [Islamic judge] in Athens for more than 25 years. His manuscript shows that, although Mahmud Efendi did not know Ancient Greek at the time, he had benefitted from some local Greek Orthodox priests requesting their particular help with translations. He is understood to have used not only Herodotus as a source, whose name in the work was Elkarnais (the man from Halikarnas), for depicting Athen's earlier history, but Thucydides, Diodorus, and Plutarch, as well.² A 17th century historian by the name of Hezarfen Hüseyin Efendi also stated having benefitted from the writings of Greek and Roman historians in his work, but he unfortunately made no mention of any specific names.³ Still, based on the content and character of his studies, he can be ascertained as not having utilized Herodotus as a source, as he only dealt with the history of Rome and the city of Constantinople (Nas, 2019, p. 4, 9).

Ottoman intellectuals' close contact with Europe, especially with France and French literature during the Tanzimat, resulted in the production of the first volume fully devoted to a general history of ancient Greece as well. This work had the character of a classic textbook and was written at the end of the 19th century by a non-Muslim, Konstantinidi Efendi (Sevük, 1940, p. 81). The work deals with the events between the years 2200 BC-146 BC, with the first 108 pages summarizing events from the beginning to the end of the Persian Wars. Normally the author can be assumed to have used Herodotus, but due to the volume lacking any proper introduction, bibliography, or reference to any ancient historian, it likely was based heavily on a contemporary textbook published in a modern language.

An awakening to classical antiquity appeared to have occurred with regard to the foundation of Western literature being the literature of the ancient Greeks and Romans. The reformist Ottoman intellectuals, who saw French literature and its genres in particular as ideal, wanted to apply these formulations to contemporary Turkish literature. In this respect, they felt the need to translate Greek and Roman classics into Turkish in order to understand the French literature better. At the end of the 19th century, this idea had become dominant among some literary spheres of the empire, and efforts of this sort gained pace. Among the first fruits of these efforts was the partial translation of Homer's Iliad in 1887 by the Albanian intellectual, Naim Fraşari.

Translations of Herodotus in Republican Turkey

The Turkish audience would have to wait longer for a translation of Herodotus, as the first attempt didn't occur until 1934, and this was only a partial translation that covered just those parts of the work containing information about the Scythians. This translation Ali Rıza

2 Orhonlu (1974, p. 129 n48) reads "Elkarnais," while Tunalı (2020, p. 89-90) reads "Alkarnas." By any means, the original name of the historian can clearly be deduced as Herodotus of Hallicarnassus. For a detailed examination of this work, see Tunalı Koç 2006; Tunalı, 2020.

3 Tenkihü't Tevarih'ül Mülük, 2a, as cited in Nas 2019, pp. 18-19; 32.

Seyfi carried out had been based on the English translation Henry Cary (1847) did in the middle of the 19th century. Seyfi also assured the readers in his book that the volume also included the most recent studies done by Europeans on Scythian scholarship.⁴ The Scythians were seen as the forefathers of the Turks at the time, and for this reason the author felt the need to only translate the relevant parts of Herodotus into Turkish, along with a 31-page summary of recent research on the relevant area. As such, this work can be counted as the first representation of the main reasons of interest shown in Herodotus in earlier Turkish scholarship. Herodotus remained the focus of interest in research about the roots of early Turks until around the 1980s, and this line of study partially still continues these days due to certain academicians and non-academicians accepting a connection to exist between the so-called Proto-Turks and the Etruscans as well as between the Proto-Turks and the Scythians.

By all means, Herodotus had now become a familiar figure to the public in Turkey during the first half of the 20th century. According to one mention in the book *European Literature and Us* published by İsmail Habib Sevük in 1940, various people at this time were attempting to translate the entirety of Herodotus' work. The author İsmail Habib Sevük recalled a memory of his in his book's Introduction. He had encountered Hayrullah Örs Bey, the translator of Xenophon's *Anabasis* into Turkish while publishing his own book, with Örs Bey stating that he had started translating Herodotus' work into Turkish but had decided to stop upon hearing that Ali Rıza Seyfi had made a full translation. İsmail Habib advised Örs Bey that Seyfi had only done a partial translation with no intention of making a full translation, after which Örs Bey became excited and stated that he would now continue the translation. This conversation took place in 1940, but Örs Bey's translation of Herodotus was never published (Sevük, 1940, p. v). Meanwhile, a year later, the first attempt at a full translation of Herodotus occurred, with Ömer Rıza Doğrul using George Rawlinson's English text for the translation; Doğrul published his first volume, which covered the first four books of the work, and published the second volume containing the last five books two years later, with a full volume of Herodotus' work being made available to the Turkish audience in those years.

Thirty years after this achievement, new efforts are now seen at making fresh translations of the work, due to the language of the first Turkish text having become outdated due to the language reforms of the young Republic that had aimed to purify Turkish by eliminating many thousands of Persian and Arabic words and their relevant grammatical features. 1973 saw not one but two new full translations of Herodotus; Perihan Kuturman's text was published in April 1973 with a foreword from Cevat Şakir Kabaağaçlı, a famous humanist author also known as the Fisherman of Halicarnassus. Neither Cevat Şakir nor the translator stated which text had been used for the translation. Cevat Şakir was content to state that

4 For information on Henry Cary and his translation of Herodotus see <https://adb.anu.edu.au/biograph/y/cary-henry-3175>.

the work as being a “translation as a translation should be,”⁵ while the translator made no remarks at all. However, due to Kuturman having worked as a translator at the Associated Press bureau in Istanbul at that time and having interpreted other titles from English, she probably based her work off of an English text.⁶ Even though I did compare some small sections of the Turkish text with a few popular English translations including Rawlinson’s, Godley’s and the Penguin translation from de Selincourt, I have not yet been able to specify which text she had chosen to work from. Still, upon first look she can be determined to have chosen a good English text that followed the original work very closely.

Seven months after the appearance of Kuturman’s translation, a new Turkish translation of Herodotus became available in December 1973. Müntekim Ökmen based this translation on the French one by Henri Berguin (1932). One significant feature of the text was that, despite not having been translated from the original language, a Turkish text for the first time now could be compared with the Ancient Greek edition prepared by Rudolf Dietsch (1866-1882, which is the standard Teubner edition). The comparison was made by the classical philologist Azra Erhat, who also did the Turkish translations of the Iliad and the Odyssey from their original ancient Greek editions. Thanks to this quality of work, the interpretation became the standard Turkish text on Herodotus, and despite two new translations having appeared in more recent years, these have not yet been able to challenge Ökmen’s Turkish translation.⁷

Direct Studies on Herodotus

All these translations have contributed greatly to Herodotus being recognized by a wide audience in Turkey. In the meantime, studies dealing with Herodotus and his work started gradually appearing in Turkish. However, the almost 80 years in the 20th century were not very fruitful in terms of Herodotean studies. The main reasons behind this scarcity of studies were both the lack of scholars concentrating on ancient historiography as well as the inadequacy of libraries in universities for these types of studies. Both of these aspects have been subject to change in the last decades, as the number of Turkish scholars who have benefitted from an education in classics mostly in European or Turkish universities as well

5 From Kabağağaç’s introduction to Kuturman’s translation, p. 14.

6 For information about her job as a translator, see: <https://tarihdergi.com/62-yillik-bir-dostluk-ve-ara-guler-markasi/>

7 Two recent translations are by Furkan Akderin and Burcu Uzunoğlu. No information is found on the method used in Uzunoğlu’s translation; however, most likely an English translation was used. Akderin claimed his translation to be an interpretation from the original ancient Greek edition, but one can easily determine after a brief inspection that this text also unfortunately draws heavily from Ökmen’s Turkish translation in all respects, often only changing the word order or sometimes basically using synonyms for the words that have become outdated. My plan in the near future is to make a thorough comparison among all the translations available in Turkish following the primary observations made in this paper and to publish them as an independent article concentrating only on this matter. Another book is also found that at first glance appears to be a translation; after close examination though, it appears more like a novel drawing on Herodotus’ work (Gezik 2012).

as the number of positions offered in universities for these scholars having risen marginally. In addition, the digitalization movement around the world has almost completely removed the disadvantage of not having substantial specialized libraries full of hard-copy books in Turkey. Over the course of time, some university libraries throughout the country have also improved their collections as well. For all these reasons, the number of particular studies devoted to Herodotus in Turkish has risen in the recent years.

My aim is an attempt to show the tendencies of these studies in order to provide a clear picture of Herodotean scholarship in Turkey over time instead of addressing each study individually, and all these studies appear to be groupable under four main categories. Chronologically, the first major subject involves the studies in relation to the roots of early Turkic peoples. The studies focusing on this area had been very active in the first 40 years of the new Republican regime, during which both academicians and non-academicians enthusiastically attempted to demonstrate the links the so-called Proto-Turks had with the Etruscans and Scythians. This was of course mostly in relation to the new theories on Turkish history in Anatolia and Mediterranean, as well as the nation- and identity-building theories of the new Republic. The pioneer figure in this field of research was Mrs. Adile Ayda, who as a Turkish diplomat had served many years in the mid-20th century in Europe, especially in Italy, where she had time to become an enthusiast of studies on Etruscology in particular. Although she did not have any skills in Etruscan, Latin, or Ancient Greek, she still arduously wrote about the supposed connections of Etruscans, early Turks, and Scythians using mostly passages from Herodotus. She published articles in most of the revered scientific journals of the time in Turkey and book-length studies on these matters as well. While these works unfortunately lacked any scientific methodology or systematic approach, she still had a significant impact on the public and academic spheres of her time. Today's academic studies are almost immune to the effects of this kind of approach, but the reflections of these studies can still be generally seen in the public.

Recent years have seen more works devoted to the study of Herodotus in Turkish from different perspectives. In particular, the theme of the Greeks and the “other” regarding Herodotus became another main area in which many scholars have shown interest. In the last 20 years, over 10 studies have occurred in Turkish that investigate this aspect of his work. This might also relate to François Hartog's (1980) groundbreaking work *The Mirror of Herodotus* being translated into Turkish in 1997 and having clearly made an impact on scholarly circles. Hartog's book was also instrumental for the one and only book-length study on Herodotus by a Turkish scholar. This influence can be clearly seen just by looking at the title of the study: “Herodotus in the Mirror.” Gezgın (2004) immediately pays homage to Hartog in his introduction, stating his influence to be unequivocal. The study employs an interdisciplinary approach for dealing with different aspects of Herodotus and his work and notably attempts to

analyze Herodotus' view on foreign societies and women. The study attempts to interpret the ideology of Herodotus as well as to evaluate his place in ancient historiography and possibly stands out as the most interesting work on the historian in Turkish, especially considering the author's interdisciplinary approach despite not being the only study on these issues, as has been previously mentioned. For example, a very recent doctoral dissertation (Yalazı 2019) dealt only with Herodotus' view towards Persians, while another master's thesis (Payam, 2014) examined the place of women in the work of Herodotus, reaching the conclusion that some actions considered as shameful in Greek society were generally ascribed to foreign women in order to idealize Greek women. These and other similar studies might be seen as another main branch of Herodotean scholarship in Turkish.

Some scholars confined their studies on the credibility of specific information regarding Herodotus' work. This group of studies has also increased in the past 20 years, but the first instance of this sort dates back to 1976. One article written by Veli Sevin (1976), an ancient historian at Istanbul University, examined in detail a passage in Herodotus about Pamphylia. This article was also the first of its kind to systematically scrutinize and test the information Herodotus provided. In Book 1, Chapter 28, Herodotus claimed the Lydian King Croesus to have conquered many places in Anatolia, including Pamphylia. Prof. Sevin, however, argued that this information might be untrustworthy and provided illustrations of some of Herodotus' mistakes in that passage. One of these instances involved Herodotus naming the Khalybians as the people living on the western side of the River Halys; in fact, they were among the peoples who lived to the east of that river, namely in the place known today as Ordu (or ancient Kotyora and its surroundings). Sevin also checked and discredited Herodotus' likely sources for that passage and reached the conclusion that the cities of Pamphylia might not have been under the sovereignty of Croesus at all because Pamphylia was a region very hard to reach from land at the time and important primarily for its maritime superiority, whereas the kingdom of Lydia had never had a proper naval policy, and Lydian kings likely never deemed Pamphylia to be worth conquering (pp. 185–93).

Following the first example in this direction, a few additional articles in recent years have also focused on different passages and topics of Herodotus in an effort to test the information the historian had provided. For instance, Baz's (2016, pp. 49–50) article concentrated on the narratives of Herodotus regarding the Cimmerians and their pursuit of the Scythians, in which the author arrived at the judgement that Herodotus's information on the matter should be carefully handled because a 50-year time difference had likely occurred between the arrival of these two groups into Anatolian inlands.

There is also an article (Demir 2021) dealing with Herodotus's description of the Persian Royal Road by comparing it with other ancient sources or an article (Güveloğlu 2014, pp. 8-9) specifically delving into the eating and drinking habits of different societies appeared in

Herodotus's work to see if these habits were pointed out one of the elements of civilization. Güveloğlu's argument was that Herodotus had used this category to also create a contrast between Greeks and non-Greeks by applying certain customs Greeks considered uncivilized to these non-Greek societies.

The last major area of Herodotean scholarship in Turkish involves the methodological studies examining Herodotus' techniques on history writing. Şentuna's (1985) brief essay was the first example of these types of studies, while Karayel's (1990) master's thesis was entirely dedicated to the historical method of Herodotus. The latter study can be seen as the first serious attempt to systematically analyze the Herodotean method of history writing as it deals with Herodotus' life, travels, purposes, sources, aims, and composition. The study continues with a detailed examination of his work, paying attention to its language and style. The last chapter of the study deals with Herodotus as a historian and his methods, the questions of impartiality and credibility, as well as his religious views and views on government. However, the difficulties with accessing specific modern sources in the 1990s in Turkey seemed to have affected the outcome of the study negatively, as the author failed to take into account many recent discussions on the historian. Nevertheless, this work should be deemed important due to how it reflects and transfers the general opinions that took shape within the international scholarly cycles to Turkish literature until the first half of the 20th century. Çoraklı's (2017, pp. 59–100) recent doctoral dissertation was published as a book and focused on the genesis of the idea of research in ancient Greece in general; it has filled the gap and brought the literature up to date due to its in-depth study on Herodotus' methodology by drawing on recent monographs and other recent critical studies.⁸

Conclusion

The articles, dissertations, and books I have briefly mentioned above might be seen as the core of Herodotean studies in Turkish, and the total number of 34 titles critically analyzing Herodotus' work provide a fairly good introduction to Turkish readers of Herodotus who might want to deepen their knowledge about the historian and his work. One might also argue that some of these studies might even have a fair amount of potential for contributing to international Herodotean studies, and seeing Turkish scholars contribute to Herodotean studies globally in the near future would come as no surprise due to the digitalization of sources as well as the globalization of the world having made a positive impact on the global participation of Turkish scholars.

⁸ Also an article by Kaçar (1997) deals with the methodology and ideas of Herodotus. In his study Kaçar tries to show that Herodotus was not only a storyteller of his time but a fierce defender of democracy against the rising imperialism of the Persians and with this feature, Kaçar adds, the ancient historian demonstrates the hybris and depravity of the monarchic rulers seen in the models like Xerxes and Cyrus the Great.

Before finishing my conclusion, I feel the need to note that, while the currently available Turkish translations of Herodotus have made the job of Turkish scholars a bit easier and also allowed the general reader to read the work of this historian, the most important shortcoming of the Turkish literature still remains the lack of a translation of Herodotus from its original language. Having classical scholars soon fill this gap would positively affect scholarly studies, as all Turkish translations have inaccurate interpretations regarding certain parts, primarily due to them being based on translations from modern languages. Also, because most Turkish scholars have not had the benefit of an education in classics or are not native speakers of English, German, French, or some other language in which direct translations of Herodotus are available, I consider an interpretation of Herodotus into Turkish from its original language to be an indispensable work.

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