

Call for Papers

Empire in Translation

Perso-Arabic Knowledge and the Making of Early Modern Ottoman Civilisation

University of Münster, 15–17 January 2025

The Ottoman polity initially emerged as a peripheral entity in the broader knowledge network of the Islamic world. Following the conquest of Constantinople, however, the ascending Empire rapidly became a central hub, as sultans Mehmed II and his son Bāyezīd II increasingly sponsored scholarly and literary works. Translation activities played a pivotal role in this transformation, further accelerated in the early sixteenth century by two major events: the conquest of Mamluk Syria and Egypt by Sultan Selīm I and the Safavid takeover of Iran.

In addition to transforming the Ottoman Empire's standing in the (Sunni) Islamic world and establishing its (Shia) archenemy in the East, these events marked a definitive shift in the making of Ottoman literature and scholarship. The influx of Arab scholars from classical Islamic centres like Cairo and Damascus, along with Persian scholars seeking refuge from anti-Sunni persecution in Iran, exposed Ottoman elites in Istanbul and across the Empire to Arabic and Persian knowledge on an unprecedented scale.

The translation of texts across all genres of Islamic literature and scholarship, including poetry, history, encyclopedias, and religious sciences, played a crucial role in the development and acculturation of this emerging Ottoman civilisation. It legitimised the Ottomans' self-image as heralds of a new Islamic 'golden age', embodying a symbolic *translatio imperii* of cultural and political leadership within the Islamic world.

The early modern Ottoman approach to translation (*terceme*) differed from a strict literal rendition from the source language to the target language. Instead, it embraced diverse forms of adaptation, imitation, rewriting, and repurposing. This characteristic suggests that Ottoman translations were more than just a means of conveying knowledge; they served as a tool in shaping a distinct literary and scholarly culture.

To investigate these phenomena, we are inviting contributions for a conference titled **‘Empire in Translation: Perso-Arabic Knowledge and the Making of Early Modern Ottoman Literature and Scholarship’**, to be held at the **University of Münster (Germany)** on **15–17 January 2025**. This conference is organised by the Emmy Noether Junior Research Group **TRANSLAPT, Inner-Islamic Transfer of Knowledge within Arabic-Persian-Ottoman Translation Processes in the Eastern Mediterranean (1400–1750)**, which aims to investigate the transregional transfer of knowledge holistically by focusing on **translation as a concept, process, and product** in a large portion of the Islamic world.

In this framework, we invite contributions that focus on early modern translation processes between Arabic, Persian, and Turkish, with particular attention to the study of manuscript copies of these translations. Our inquiry is structured around the following research questions:

What underlies Ottoman notions of translation (terceme), and what defines their nature and limits compared to other literary practices? Who were the actors involved in translation processes, and what roles did they play? What was the intended and actual readership for the translations, and what was the socio-cultural context of their circulation? In essence, what role did translation play in the transformation of the Empire through the transfer of knowledge?

The contributors are expected to present specific case studies or broader theoretical analyses addressing one or several of these research questions, as well as any other topic relevant to the theme of the conference.

The conference will be held in English. Travel and accommodation expenses will be covered.

Application Procedure

Please send your abstracts (max. 400 words) and a short biography (max. 200 words) to Dr. Sacha Alsancakli (translapt@uni-muenster.de), indicating your academic affiliation. Abstracts and biography should be submitted in English as one pdf file named with the applicant’s surname by **17 March 2024**.

You will be notified of the acceptance of your paper by 15 April 2024.