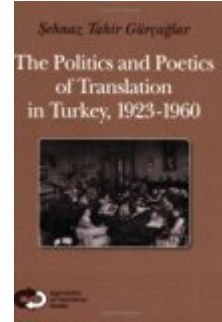


Şehnaz Tahir Gürçağlar. *The Politics and Poetics of Translation in Turkey, 1923-1960*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2008. 331 pp. \$95.70 (paper), ISBN 978-90-420-2329-1.

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Evolving Models of Translation

Şehnaz Tahir Gürçağlar's *The Politics and Poetics of Translation in Turkey, 1923-1960* focuses on translation activity in the first fifty years of the Turkish Republic. Her basic contention is that there were two opposing movements—the dominant position represented by the government-sponsored Translation Bureau and the resistant position maintained by private publishers. Drawing on Pierre Bourdieu's concept of *habitus*, more precisely defined as “a method or mechanism between social webs and the actual practices performed by individual actors,” she argues that the early years of the Turkish Republic were dominated by cultural planning, which could be divided into two distinct phases (p. 44). The first phase involved the creation of the Translation Bureau in 1940; the creation of the People's Houses (*Halk Evi*) in fourteen towns and cities as a way of disseminating newly produced translations to the people; and the establishment of Village Institutes, which provided an important means to propagate the official culture through reading programs and critical debate. Gürçağlar quotes Vedat Günyol, who taught French at Hasanoğlu Village Institute in the 1940s, and maintains that literature teachers made a special effort to teach Translation Bureau-produced versions of French classics to students (p. 78).

The second phase—which Gürçağlar terms the “deplanning” phase (p. 82)—began soon after the transition to a multiparty system of government in 1946. The Village Institutes were abolished, and the People's Houses converted into cultural foundations for the general public. Translation activity was refocused, with the empha-

sis placed not on the introduction of Western classics into Turkey, but rather on the production of patriotic material. Throughout the fifty-year period covered by these two phases, however, the prevailing approach to translation remained roughly similar. While translators were recognized for their efforts—as their names appeared on the title page immediately below the original author's name—the Translation Bureau expected them to observe the principle of *sadakat*, which Gürçağlar defines as “fidelity to textual integrity, fidelity to content and form and fidelity to the 'tone'” (p. 138). Such strategies would expand the capacity of the language to express complicated concepts, as well as contribute more generally to the cause of Turkish humanism.

By contrast the field of popular literature was governed by an entirely different poetics. In a fascinating series of chapters—drawing on primary sources hitherto not discussed in English—Gürçağlar argues that private publishers shunned the idea of fidelity in translation. Classic texts were ruthlessly plundered, often appearing in heavily abbreviated form; in most cases the translator's and the author's names did not appear on the title page, and the text's status as a translation or an “original” work was not specified (p. 196). Early examples of this type of work included *Hindistan Ormanlarında* (*In the Forests of India*), first published in 1926 in Ottoman script. This was a pamphlet of sixteen pages, bringing Sherlock Holmes and Arsène Lupin together. No author's name appears, while the nominal translator—Selâmi Münir Yurdatap—is introduced as the *nakil* (“agent of transfer”). Gürçağlar argues

that this soubriquet denotes “a gray area between translation and indigenous writing” (p. 213). In truth this distinction had no significance in the popular imagination; what mattered more was that texts should incorporate elements derived from Turkish folktales, while prioritizing action over psychological, social, and stylistic elements (p. 227). Gürçağlar shows these ideas in action in Kemal Tahir’s versions of Mickey Spillane’s Mike Hammer, the first of which appeared in 1954 and sold over one hundred thousand copies. Such texts, she argues, are distinguished by “the appropriation of foreign characters, the indifference towards the authorial provenance of the [original] works and the lack of a clear-cut distinction between translated and indigenous works” (p. 259). What mattered most—in the publishers’ eyes at least—was that such texts possessed local appeal.

The book concludes with a close analysis of different translations of Jonathan Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels* (1726). The conclusions are much the same—that there were two distinct poetics and cultural *habituses* guiding the production, marketing, and reception of the texts. Sometimes Gürçağlar’s analysis betrays its origins as a doctoral thesis—for example, in its rather mechanical structure with innumerable sections and subsections, which make the argument rather difficult to follow. Her book might have benefited from more judicious subediting, as its basic thesis is repeated ad nauseam. Nonetheless Gürçağlar is to be congratulated for her thorough and painstaking analysis of a subject hitherto untouched in English, which tells us as much about the Turkish Republic’s cultural policies in the mid-twentieth century as about the translations themselves.

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