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When one considers the relations between Greeks and Turks during the Ottoman period, one is surprised to see how little evidence there is of literary contact. The impact of the Turkish language on the vernacular language of the subject population is well documented. But at a higher level, one has the impression that the two communities lived in almost complete ignorance of each other’s cultural traditions, literature, and literary language. Indeed, there is hardly a single recorded instance of a member of one community using the literary language of the other as a medium of literary expression.1

Admittedly, the literary languages of the two communities—on

1 Cf. the bibliography by P. Chidioglou, "Βιβλιογραφική Συμβολή εις την Έλληνικήν Τουρκολογίαν," Επετείου του Κεντρού Επιστημονικών Σπουδών (Nicosia 1975–77), pp. 253–405 [reprinted in Συμβολή στην Ελληνική Τουρκολογία, vol. I (Athens 1990)]. Major histories of Modern Greek literature (Dimaras, Politis, etc.) never mention writings by Greeks in Ottoman. Much the same is true of studies devoted to the role of Greeks in the Ottoman Empire (cf. e.g. A. Alexandris ‘Οι Έλληνες στην υπηρεσία της Οθωμανικής Αυτοκρατορίας, 1850–1921’ Delton tés Historikés kai Ethnologikés Hetairéas tés Hellados 23 (1980), pp. 365–404). In Turkish works, they fare little better. Perhaps not surprisingly, non-Muslims are excluded from Bursali Mehmed Tahir’s comprehensive repertory of Ottoman writers (‘Osmani Müellifleri, 3 vols., Istanbul 1333–42 [1914–23]), whereas in Mehmed Süreyya’s bibliographical dictionary (Sicill-i ‘Osmani, 4 vols., Istanbul 1308–11 [1890–93] non-Muslims are relegated to the appendix (Hatime) of vol. IV (pp. 872–79 where occasionally references are also made to their literary achievements). The names of a few Greek writers occur in more recent works on literary history but they do not seem to warrant a more comprehensive treatment. The articles included in Benjamin Braude-Bernard Lewis (eds.), Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire. The Functioning of a Plural Society, 2 vols., London 1982, also have very little to say on this subject.
the one hand, the archaic variety of Modern Greek which had such fervent supporters among the élite of the community, and on the other, the elaborate and ornate language used by the Ottoman chancery and the majority of poets and writers—were highly sophisticated as regards orthography, lexicon, and stylistic possibilities. It is also perhaps not surprising that the Ottoman Turks failed to make a significant contribution to Greek letters as long as their interest in foreign languages was limited to Arabic and Persian, which formed an integral part of the training of the educated classes, and which were not too foreign, since elements of these languages had to a large extent been incorporated into the Ottoman literary language. This phenomenon is much more puzzling in the case of the Greek Orthodox community, for the office of Translator of the Imperial Divan (D韋n-i Hümayun terc韋manlar韛, known as the “Grand Dragomans of the Porte” in the West)—the highest public office open to non-Muslim subjects in the Ottoman Empire at that time—was held exclusively by members of this community for more than one and a half centuries; this was primarily due to their linguistic skills, and in particular to their perfect knowledge of the elaborate Ottoman literary language.

2 Although it is somewhat problematic, this term will be used in this paper for the generally more elaborate variety of Ottoman Turkish which had developed on the basis of Persian models and whose usage was widespread both in the chancery and in the literature. The literary language of the Ottoman period still lacks a comprehensive and adequate description. (For some characteristics see Alekso Bombari, “The Turkic literatures. Introductory notes on the history and style,” Philologiae Turcicæ Fundamenta, vol. II. Aquis Mattiacis 1964, pp. XI–LXXII; esp. pp. XXVII–XXX, Barbara Flemming, “Bemerkungen zur türkischen Prosa vor der Tanzimat-Zeit”, Der Islam 50 (1973), pp. 157–67). Authors of the Ottoman period did not usually distinguish between different registers and employed terms like (lisan-ı) türkî/ösmâni or türke, indiscriminately referring both to the written and spoken language. The same applies to most Ottoman Greek scholars who use the terms othomâni kî or türkî glôssa.

Since we are dealing with written literature, we shall not refer to folk-literature, where more points of contact (although of a different nature) may be discovered. Wrts in Karamanlı (Turkish in Greek script), whose language does not differ from standard Ottoman, have been excluded because this literature developed in almost complete isolation from Ottoman literature (it does not, incidentally, contain any “original” work in the proper sense). Furthermore, very few Muslim Turks seem to have been aware of its very existence.