Nil Ö. Palabıyık. *Silent Teachers: Turkish Books and Oriental Learning in Early Modern Europe, 1544-1669*. New York: Routledge, 2023. 274 p., ISBN 9780367359782.

THEO A. KNIGHTS

The University of Chicago, PhD Student.
(knightst@uchicago.edu), ORCID: 0009-0003-4712-0333.

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Browsing recent works about early modern orientalists, by the likes of Noel Malcom, Gerald Toomer, Alexander Bevilacqua, and Natalie Rothman, a reader might conclude that these early scholars of Islamic civilization lacked any interest in learning Ottoman Turkish, the written language of the cultural and administrative elite of the empire that then controlled the core Islamic lands.[1] Yet, almost inexplicably, sitting in any of Europe's numerous manuscript libraries, the researcher is confronted with an enormous wealth of Ottoman manuscripts and reading aids acquired by these same individuals. Nil Ö. Palabıyık's *Silent Teachers: Turkish Books and Oriental Learning in Early Modern Europe, 1544–1669* offers us the first steps out of this paradox, providing a sorely needed corrective to our existing understanding of the place of Ottoman Turkish in orientalist scholarship. Palabıyık takes aim at a literature which has portrayed these scholars as neglectful of Turkish, and the language as a "workaday tongue" that "would hardly feature ... in their scholarly activities."[2] By shifting the focus from printed grammars and translations to the study of specific copies of early printed books, the Turkish-language manuscripts of orientalists, and the written traces of their readings, Palabıyık demonstrates the importance that early modern orientalists attributed to the study of Ottoman Turkish. In the process, Palabıyık reveals how scholars, in Paris, Leiden, and several German university towns, emulated the methods of their Ottoman counterparts, relying on Turkish commentaries, dictionaries, and other reading aids to explicate difficult Arabic and Persian texts.

Palabıyık's first chapter emphasizes the perils of relying on the earliest European printed texts about the Empire, and the lists of Turkish vocabulary they included, as an accurate window into orientalist learning in this period. Through an examination of the publications of Bartholomew Georgievits, an alleged Ottoman captive, and Guillaume

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1 Noel Malcolm, "Comenius, Boyle, Oldenburg, and the Translation of the Bible into Turkish," *Church History and Religious Culture* 87, no. 3 (January 1, 2007): 327-62; Noel Malcom, "The Study of Islam in Early Modern Europe: Obstacles and Missed Opportunities," in *Antiquarianism and Intellectual Life in Europe and China, 1500-1800*, eds. Peter N. Miller and François Louis (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2012), 265-288; Gerald Toomer, *Eastern Wisedome and Learning: The Study of Arabic in Seventeenth-Century England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996); Alexander Bevilacqua, *The Republic of Arabic Letters: Islam and the European Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2018); Natalie Rothman, *The Dragoman Renaissance: Diplomatic Interpreters and the Routes of Orientalism* (Ithaca New York: Cornell University Press, 2021).

2 Malcolm, "Comenius, Boyle, Oldenburg," 361.

Postel, the "language expert" of a French diplomatic mission to the Empire, Palabıyık demonstrates the limitations of these authors' linguistic competency. Palabıyık also highlights these authors' use of European vernacular languages and lower registers of Latin, their appeals to popular sentiments, and the numerous editions of their texts. Such factors lead her to suggest that these publications were intended to capitalize on the demands of the book market, rather than serve as robust tools for language learning.

Having established the relative unimportance of the earliest printed texts about Turkish for these orientalists, Palabıyık analyzes the correspondence and marginal notes of the humanist Joseph Scaliger to illuminate what scholars themselves made of the language. Scaliger is a familiar figure in the literature on early modern scholarly practices, but we see him here in a new light.[3] He is the first European scholar to argue that attaining proficiency in Turkish was useful for understanding Arabic because, "Turkish held the key to utilizing readily available dictionaries, grammars, commentaries, and other study aids that were produced in the Ottoman Empire."[4] Scaliger could never realize this approach to Arabic sources, as he was continually frustrated by a lack of reliable existing material for learning Turkish or suitable language teachers. However, Scaliger's understanding of the potential benefit of Ottoman multilingual reference tools for the work of European scholars did not die with him, and the approach would bear fruit in the first half of the seventeenth century.

It is only after Scaliger's death that the traditional narrative of Turkish language scholarship in Europe begins, with the publication in 1612 of the first printed grammar of Turkish, Hieronymous Megiser's *Institutionum linguae turcicae libri quatuor*. It is Palabıyık's careful study of the various surviving copies of this text that lead to the most astounding revelation of the entire book. An unusual dedication, extant in only one copy of the grammar, and an attack on Megiser in the vanity publication of a seventeenth century veterinarian, reveal that Megiser appears to have known little or no Turkish, and had, for almost four centuries, successfully passed off a manuscript composed by Hector von Ernau as his own. Von Ernau was an Austrian nobleman who had served for six years on a diplomatic mission in Istanbul. After compiling the grammar, he had sought Megiser's assistance in finding a printer. To carry out the fraud,

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3 Anthony Grafton, *Joseph Scaliger: A Study in the History of Classical Scholarship*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983).

4 Nil Ö. Palabıyık, *Silent Teachers: Turkish Books and Oriental Learning in Early Modern Europe, 1544-1669* (New York: Routledge, 2023), 55.

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Megiser convinced a friend to publish the grammar with a title page listing himself as the author as well as a bifolium insert containing a dedicatory poem acknowledging the grammar as the work of von Ernau. However, Megiser only included this insert in those copies he sent to the true author, a trick which worked, in part, because von Ernau was located at some distance from the place of publication.

As Palabıyık demonstrates, however, neither Megiser's plagiarized work, nor a more robust grammar by André Du Ryer, were sufficient for an interested scholar to acquire competency in Turkish without the assistance of a local language teacher. This would only begin to change in the 1630s with the growth of a circle of students around the Dutch orientalist Jacob Golius. Perhaps the most important contribution of this circle was made by the hitherto unknown—and purportedly cantankerous—physician Anton Deusing. Deusing composed a Persian-Turkish-Latin lexicon by collating Persian headwords from Golius' weighty collection of Ottoman manuscripts and painstakingly translating their Turkish definitions into Latin. The dictionary followed Scaliger's advice to the letter, making extensive use of a number of Ottoman lexicographic works, in particular the popular Persian-Turkish dictionary *Luġat-ı Niʿmetullāh*, as well as Turkish translations of older Arabic and Persian lexica. Although Deusing's lexicon was to remain in manuscript, it formed a major, if unacknowledged, part of Golius' posthumously published *Dictionarium persico-latinum*. Deusing's work was also one of the key tools enabling Golius' lifelong study of Turkish literature.

Embedded in Palabıyık's discovery of the first successful application of linguistic reference works from the Ottoman Empire by European orientalists is another important claim. Palabıyık argues that these Ottoman manuscripts exerted a far greater influence on the work of orientalist scholarship than native-speaker language assistants. Palabıyık notes curtly that "the word of these assistants ... ought to be taken with a pinch of salt," arguing that they "depended on the income from the services they provided to the orientalists" and therefore "constantly needed to justify their position" and compete "with others who could replace them."[5] This is a curious argument, given the growing number of studies that have outlined the contributions of native informants, sometimes called pundits, from both Ottoman and Indo-Persian contexts to orientalists' learning, as well as their systematic erasure by European scholarly

5 Palabıyık, *Silent Teachers*, 154.

culture.[6] Further, these native informants appear throughout Palabıyık's text. Scaliger repeatedly bemoans his lack of access to "the help of a Christian capable of speaking and writing Turkish expertly."[7] Golius enriched his copy of Deusing's lexicon on the basis of input from his onetime assistant Ḥaḳḳvėrdi, relied on another assistant, Nicholas Petri, to author a letter in Turkish, while a third informant, Şāhīn Ḳandī, assisted him with Arabic. At the same time, Palabıyık repeatedly demonstrates the appropriation and marginalization to which these scholars were willing to subject the work of their own friends and students in their personal search for grandeur. It strikes this reviewer as particularly difficult to ascertain the full impact of these language assistants, because much of the knowledge they imparted must have occurred via oral and other ephemeral modes of transmission. Moreover, they existed as interlopers in a discipline that rewarded a heroic model of scholarship and the appearance of originality. Whether we accept Palabıyık's revision to the influence of native informants on orientalists' scholarly practices, she is certainly not reproducing what Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi has called, "the binary assumption of 'Oriental silence' and 'Western writing'" at the heart of the field's "genesis amnesia."[8] After all, the central theme of Palabıyık's work is the importance of non-Western texts—dictionaries, reading aids, and commentaries—to the development of the field of orientalism.

The final chapter focuses on Golius' reading and acquisition of Turkish manuscripts. Through a close reading of two letters, Palabıyık upends the existing interpretation of the identity of Golius' Turkish speaking correspondent. Nicholas Petri, writing on Golius' behalf, identifies his correspondent as a certain Şeyḫzāde Meḥmed Efendi, which the secondary literature has repeatedly—and seemingly without justification—associated with Şeyḫzāde Meḥmed, a high-ranking member of the Ottoman *'ulemā,* who rose to the post of Anadolu *kazasker,* and passed away about twelve years after the first letter in the extant correspondence was sent. Palabıyık points to a number of discrepancies that make this reading of his identity questionable.

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6 Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi, "Orientalism's Genesis Amnesia," in *Refashioning Iran: Orientalism, Occidentalism and Historiography* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), 18-34; Hilary Kilpatrick and Gerald J. Toomer, "Niqūlāwus Al-Ḥalabī (c.1611-c.1661): A Greek Orthodox Syrian Copyist and His Letters to Pococke and Golius," *Lias: Journal of Early Modern Intellectual Culture and Its Sources* 43 (2016): 1-159; Rothman, *The Dragoman Renaissance*.

7 Palabıyık, *Silent Teachers*, 58.

8 Tavakoli-Targhi, "Orientalism's Genesis Amnesia," 20.

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First, Şeyẖzāde Meḥmed Efendi's letter to Golius includes several Ottoman honorifics, suggesting he viewed Golius as of a higher social status than himself—an unlikely self-fashioning for a man who was at the time one of the Empire's highest-ranking judges. At the same time, Petri addresses Şeyẖzāde Meḥmed Efendi in more friendly terms than might be expected for an exchange between a scribe and a high-ranking judge. Second, the tone of Şeyẖzāde Meḥmed Efendi's letter to Golius lacks the refined style or rhyming prose popular in the epistolary practices of the elite. Finally, there is the content of the letter itself, a request that Golius intercede on Şeyẖzāde Meḥmed Efendi's behalf to recover 80 Spanish riyals from another orientalist, Christian Ravius, who had absconded without paying a debt for a manuscript. Palabıyık points out that this sum, about 6,400 *akçe*, would appear rather insignificant to a man whose daily wage as the chief judge of Aleppo—a post he departed two years before the date of the letter—would have been at least 500 *akçe*s per day. Palabıyık postulates, however, that the sum would not have been insubstantial if we identify Şeyẖzāde Meḥmed Efendi as one of Istanbul's many booksellers, whose total capital in the period has been shown to average around 41,700 *akçe*s. From the fragmentary evidence, Palabıyık draws on an impressive array of existing scholarship in English and Turkish to build a compelling alternative reading of Şeyẖzāde Meḥmed Efendi's identity.

Silent Teachers is a rousing revision to our understanding of the scholarly practices of early modern orientalists, recovering their study of Ottoman Turkish language and texts, and placing it at the center of their scholarship. That Palabıyık conveys this story through a series of compelling vignettes of fascinating individuals, both Ottoman and European, and with an accessible style, only makes it more exciting. Such a corrective to a long-established narrative about the unimportance of Turkish to European scholarship is no doubt made possible by Palabıyık's mastery of both Ottoman Turkish and Latin language and paleography, on display throughout the text and its numerous appendices. In revising our understanding of the place of Turkish and the importance of Ottoman linguistic methodologies in the nascent field of orientalism, Palabıyık's work raises a new set of questions about Turkish learning in European geographies beyond Paris, Leiden, and the German university towns, as well as by other social classes, which await answers from scholars both of early modern Europe and the Ottoman Empire.