

Netherlands Institute in Turkey

Lectures

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Homer in Modern Europe

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Homer is considered the father of poetry in European culture, but the written Greek text of the Iliad and the Odyssey was for ages not available in modern Europe, and knowledge of Greek was almost completely lost. The re-appreciation of Homer goes side by side with the rediscovery of 'true' Greek art and architecture. Homer was given pre-eminence as the founding father of European poetry and took over the position Virgil had occupied for centuries.

The most audacious romantics even preferred Homer to the Bible. In Germany the reappraisal of Homer was considered as the true sign of a revolution in the aesthetics in Europe and of the revolt against old-fashioned humanism and antiquated classicist taste. Homer entered European classrooms during the 19th century. The popularity of the Iliad and the Odyssey coincided with the creation of modern educational systems in European empires and nation-states. In the middle of the nineteenth century Homer and new humanism seemed firmly linked in bourgeois and liberal pedagogy. But at the end of the 19th century Homer was also incorporated in the imperialist pedagogy and considered perfect reading material for the formation of the future elite of the British Empire.

Although during 20th century teachers and pedagogues became increasingly accustomed to perceive the Homeric society as totally different from our times, more than ever Homer was considered basic European heritage.

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Homer in Modern Turkey (Research progress report)

Günay Uslu

Homer, who gave antiquity its mythical ideology, has an exceptional position in the canon of modern western civilization. Since the nineteenth century Homer is considered quintessential in the formation of Europe's cultural identity. The instrumental use of Troy, the Iliad and the Odyssey for identity claims is striking. However, Homeric heritage inspired not only European cultural traditions, but the Turkish imagination as well.

The excavations of Heinrich Schliemann on Ottoman territory, the 'discovery of Homer's Troy', the smuggle of the famous 'Priam's Treasure' and following archaeological research producing the possibility of Izmir (Smyrna) as the birthplace of Homer, generated a vast Turkish awareness and appropriation of Homeric heritage during the late 19th century. For the first time, there were various attempts to translate Homeric songs into Ottoman-Turkish. In the course of the turn of the century, Troy and the artefacts as well as the Homeric songs became a reference in the Turkish Ottoman culture.

With the establishment of the Turkish republic and the 'Kemalist' nationalist reinterpretation of the history, the Trojans were considered proto-Turks. The humanist cultural policy during the thirties and the forties increased the production of humanistic essays and literature. Homer was appreciated by Turkish intellectuals, in particular by the 'Blue Anatolists', who believed that Anatolia was the birthplace of all civilizations and Homer a child of Anatolia, like all Turks.

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