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Historical Novel in Turkish Literature: The Novel "Shah and Sultan" by Iskender Pala

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Abstract

The purpose of the article is to reveal the formation and the development of historical novel genre in Turkish literature and to reveal some of its characteristic features using the example of the novel "Shah and Sultan" by the Turkish writer Iskender Pala. In this study we relied on comparative and descriptive methods of the study. We also used the method of historical analysis. Iskender Pala's novel "The Shah and the Sultan" is defined by the author of this study as a true historical novel based on genuine historical figures and events. The practical significance of the work is related to the fact that the materials and the results of this study can be used in the course of lectures on contemporary Turkish literature, as an example during literature seminars, and also to continue the study of the writer's work as a whole. Thus, we see that the genre of the novel, in particular historical one, is a relatively new phenomenon in Turkish literature. The novel by Iskandar Pala "Shah and the Sultan" is a prime example of the modern Turkish historical novel, which was based on genuine historical figures and events.

Keywords: History, Turkish literature, Oriental literature, Historical novel, Literary criticism, Philology, Iskender Pala.

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Introduction

In the 20th century, European literature has undergone changes - it was in search of something new and original. In a similar way, the Turkish literature has undergone changes in its own way under the influence of the European literature, absorbing both the literary trends of the West, the elements of the socialist worldview, and national, religious and political views. Under the influence of well-known Western writers, a new understanding of literature appeared, a new look appeared that was different from the old one. Modern Turkish literature is marked by an increased interest among writers in the history of the Ottoman state, which became the impetus for the appearance of historical novels. In this article, we will try to identify some genre features of the historical novel using the example of the work "Shah and Sultan" by the Turkish writer Iskender Pala. This novel provokes interest not only with its unusual storyline, but it is also of interest to us as a phenomenon of a historical novel in Turkish literature. Despite the fact that I. Pala's novels are very debated in Turkey, on television, by Turkish media, and by Internet readers, his works were not studied fully. According to our data, the novel did not receive a due literary analysis. There was no such a study in the works of Russian literary scholars studying Turkish literature and in the studies devoted to the works by I. Pala. Iskender Pala (born in 1958), a modern Turkish writer, professor and doctor of sciences in the field of crocheted poetry, is the author of several historical novels, for example, *Katre-i Matem* (Drop of Mourning) (2009) *Şah ve Sultan* (Shah and Sultan) (2010) and others.

The appearance of the novel under study caused a great resonance in Turkey - reviews, articles and reports were written about the novel, and I. Pala was invited by Turkish television channels for an interview about the novel, as it caused a large number of questions. This is due to the fact that it touches on the current political problems of Turkey, such as, for example, the problem of Alawites and Sunnis. This problem is considered by the author as the problem with deep historical roots that date back to the 16th century during the reign of Yavuz Sultan Selim (Selim I) in the Ottoman Empire and Shah Ismail I in Iran.

Methods

Over the years, the concept of the historical novel was rethought in various ways, which proved its "heterogeneity" in the structure. If Soviet literary studies endeavored to draw strict and precise boundaries concerning the genre of historical novel, contemporary literary criticism confirms the genre modification of the historical novel and the complexity of its definition. One of the characteristics of the modern historical novel is its hybridity, since it is at the junction of history and literature. In Russian literary criticism of the sixties a historical novel was called "an artistic verbal-shaped reconstruction of a certain past, carried out using the story about a person's fate in the system of complex social-political and moral-psychological alternatives of the past, reproduced in the modern author's interpretation" (Proskurnin, 2013: 214). L.P. Aleksandrova in her work "The peculiarities of Russian historical novel genre" writes that "the storyline of a historical novel or a story should be represented by a true fate, not a fictional one" (1960: 26). Depending on a main character, she singles out two separate genres: a historical novel, where events and heroes are genuine, and a historical and artistic novel, where historical events are revealed through the fates of fictional heroes (Alexandrova, 1987: 144). In the opinion by A.G. Bakanov, it is advisable to call such a prose a common name - "retrospective" prose, that is, the prose about the past, and proceeding from this, highlight a "retrospective novel", which in its turn is divided by him into the following 3 types: a genuine historical novel depicting genuine historical figures and events; the conditional historical novel is "... the work where the story is conditional and serves as a plot-forming soil for ideological constructs that are far from an immediate philosophical, social and moral sense of concrete episodes of the past" (Bakanov, 1989: 24), pseudo-historical novel is represented by the works of "mass" literature, which "develop antiscientific ideas about history" (ibid.). N.L. Rubakin in his article

"Historical novel and the teaching of history" writes that "a novel in the broad sense can be represented by any novel that reproduces the past historical currents of the present in their whole form and in individual representatives, in their heroes and the crowd" (1902: 12). If you turn to Turkish literary criticism, the encyclopedia "Turkish Literature" by Ahmet Kabaklı gives the following definition of a historical novel: "novels, taking themes from the life and adventures of the characters that have existed in history, and about their real or imaginary people" (1994: 463).

Literature Review

Nowadays the genre of the novel in world literature, including Turkish one, occupies one of the leading roles. The first novels in Turkish literature were the translation of novels from the French language, since it was the French literature that influenced the Turkish literature more than any other European literature. Soon, with the example of Western literature, the first novels of Turkish writers appear. The founders of the novel genre that emerged in the period of the Tanzimat (19th century) in Turkish literature are Ahmet Mithat - the novel *Hasan Mellah* (Captain Hassan) (1874), Namık Kemal - the novels *İntibah Yahut Sergüzeşt-i Ali Bey* (Awakening or Adventure of Ali Bey) (1876) and *Cezmi* (1882), Şemsettin Sami - the novel *Taaşşuk-u Talat ve Fitnat* (Love of Talat and Fitnat) (1872) and others.

One of the "pioneers" who wrote in the spirit of retrospective prose was also Ahmet Mithat with his story *Yeniçeriler* (Janissaries) (1875). After Ahmet Mithat, Namık Kemal mastered the historical prose. His novel *Cezmi* (1880), which reflects the history of the Ottoman state, the Crimea and Iran in the 16th century, as well as the idea of Islamic unity, is considered to be the first historical novel in Turkish literature.

The national liberation war in Turkey also became a popular topic of the novels of many Turkish writers, serving as the historical background in them. These are the novels by Halide Edip Adivar *Vurun Kahpeye* (Kill the Whore), by Yakup Kadri *Ankara* and *Yaban* (Stranger), Reşat Nuri Güntekin *Yeşil Gece* (Green Night) and Peyami Safa *Mahşer* (Judgment Day). However, these novels cannot be called truly historical novels, historical events are only some background in these novels.

In the era of republicanism in Turkey, the writer Abdullah Ziya Kozanoğlu (1906-1966) was known for his historical novels. His first historical novel *Kızıl Tuğ* (Red Brigadier) was published in 1927. Also during the period of republicanism in Turkey the following writers became famous: Nizamettin Nazif Tepedenlioğlu (1901-1970) by the novel *Kara Davut* (Black David) (1928), M. Turhan Tan (1886-1939) by the novel *Cehennemden Selam* (Hello from Hell) (1928), Safiye Erol (1902-1964) by the novel *Ciğerdelen* (Shturovo) (1947). Kemal Tahir (1910-1973), one of the fruitful Turkish writers, also wrote the novels in the spirit of retrospective prose. His novel *Devlet Ana* (Homeland Mother) narrates about the development of the Ottoman Empire during the reign of Osman Bey.

Postmodernism in Turkish literature appeared during the 80s of the twentieth century and its first representatives became such writers as Orhan Pamuk, Nazlı Eray, Bilge Karasu, Pınar Kür and others. The following writers are also known for their historical novels: İhsan Oktay Anar - the novel *Puslu Kıtalar Atlası* (The atlas of vague continents), Selim Hilaire - the novel *Cemil Şevket Bey Aynalı Dolaba İki El Revolver* (Two hand guns Cemil Şevket Bey mirror cabinet), Elif Şafak - the novels *Pinhan* (Enlightened) and *Şehrin Aynaları* (The reflections of the city" Reha Çamuroğlu - the novel *İsmail*, and Iskender Pala.

Results and Discussion

The studied novel by I. Pala "Shah and Sultan" refers to a genuine historical novel according to the types of retrospective prose by A.G. Bakanov, as in this novel the main characters are real historical figures - Sultan Selim I and Shah Ismail I, as well as a genuine historical event - the battle of Chaldiran in 1514.

The recreation of a genuine historical character image in the novel is not an easy task, as the author in addition to a solid character creation, has to take into account the historical details about the life of the figures of the past. The author faces difficult tasks - the images must be convincing, taking into account the world outlook of the people of that epoch, and the author expresses his vision of that time. The comprehension of outstanding figure psychology of the past revealing their spiritual search and personal experience - such tasks appear before the author of the novel about the historical past. In the novel "The Shah and the Sultan" all the action develops around two main characters, the real historical figures - Sultan Selim I and Shah Ismail I.

Since the writer uses historical chronicles and the biography of an individual during the creation of a historical person image, it is advisable to refer to the history of Sultan Selim's reign. According to the history, in the first half of the 16th century the Ottoman state expanded its borders, conquering the territories of Europe, Africa and Asia, but these conquests were not easy for them. Especially it was possible to achieve the expansion of the territories during the reign of Sultan Selim I (1465-1520). With the help of the Janissaries he takes over the power from his father Bayezid II in winter of 1512 and "by Selim's order his brothers and nephews were strangled, and some were killed in the presence of the sultan" (Petrosyan, 1990: 57). The known facts about Selim I and a lot of historical facts and chronicles about his difficult and bloody struggle for the Sultanate are combined in a specific way with a positive image in the novel "The Shah and the Sultan". However, the writer is not blind to the Sultan's brutality, calling him '*Osmanlı hanedanı içindeki en celalli ve öfkeli adam*' – "The most powerful and angry ruler of the Ottoman dynasty" (Pala, 2010: 303). Sultan's image is confronted by the antagonist image of Shah Ismail I. In history Shah Ismail I was the founder of the Safavid dynasty and conquered many lands during the years of his ruling. The author's attitude to this character is expressed by the narrator who described Shah as follows: '*Çok güzeldi ama yüzünde neden Babaydar'ın söylediği o muhteşem nuru da getirmemişti*' – "He was very handsome, but he did not have that magnificent light Babaydar was talking about" (Pala, 2010: 27). Thus, in the novel Shah Ismail and Sultan Selim are compared with each other as the rulers of two states.

Iskender Pala in the novel "Shah and Sultan" recreated the picture of Selim I reign in the Ottoman Empire and Shah Ismail I in Azerbaijani Iran. The author described the traditions, customs and social and moral values of people of that time, which were conditioned by religion and nationality, as well as by the spirit of that time. Undoubtedly, the Chaldiran battle is the main historical event reflected in the novel "Shah and Sultan". The conflict between two rulers begins with religious disagreements, their armies had the battle on the Chaldiran plain. The novel is remarkable by the fact that a reader sees the events from two sides, i.e. the narrator of each side acquaints us with the events happening in both armies. The author shows soldier preparation, the collection of weapons and ammunition, a sense of universal anxiety, the thought that they can die next day - all this happened in the two warring camps. War always carries a large number of casualties and deaths. The author does not resort to this episode softening. The novel has sufficiently detailed descriptions of the war outcome: '*Bir günde kırk bine yakın insan ölmüş, kollar, bacaklar, gövdeler, başlar Çaldıran Sahrası'nda birbirine karışmıştı*' – "About forty thousand people died on the Chaldiran plain in one day. Arms, legs, bodies, heads were mixed up" (Pala, 2010: 212).

Conclusion

Thus, we see that the genre of the novel, in particular historical one, is a relatively new phenomenon in Turkish literature. The first historical novels appeared in Turkey during the Tanzimat era. Ahmet Mithat and Namık Kemal were among the first representatives of this genre in Turkish literature. Nowadays, the genre of historical novel in Turkey is represented by a number of talented writers with a modern view of history such as Elif Shafak, Orhan Pamuk, Iskender Pala et al. The novel by Iskandar Pala "Shah and the

Sultan" is a prime example of the modern Turkish historical novel, which was based on genuine historical figures and events.

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