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Julian Rentzsch: Review of Mark Kirchner (ed.), *Geschichte der türkischen Literatur in Dokumenten. Hintergründe und Materialien zur Türkischen Bibliothek*. (Mizân 15.) Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz 2008. ISBN: 978-3-447-05790-5, 243+3 pages.

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The volume under review is an anthology of texts that mirror the development of modern Turkish literature from the late 19th century up to the present. It is aimed to be neither an account of the history of Turkish literature in itself nor a reader of literary texts *sensu stricto*. Rather, it comprises a selection of metatexts on Turkish literature.

These texts cover the important stages and currents of modern Turkish literature. The selection of texts slightly focuses on material that has some relationship to publications in the *Türkische Bibliothek* (a series of translations of important works of modern Turkish literature into German which appears in the Swiss publishing house *Unionsverlag*) but contains many other documents as well.

The target group, according to the introduction, is non-specialists in the field of Turkish studies, and one of the declared aims of the book is to facilitate comparative literary studies involving Turkish literature. With regard to the intended audience, as the introduction has it, the critical apparatus has been confined to the necessary minimum. However, precisely given the target group, it occurs to the reviewer that

the book is too scant on annotations here and there. The short introductory notes preceding both the seven main chapters as well as some of the individual texts are in fact instructive, but in quite a few cases a little bit more information would have been helpful. For example, the full significance of the blatant harangue by Nihal Atsız against Sabahattin Ali (p. 92–94), which is barely less than a death threat, only becomes apparent if the information is added that Sabahattin Ali was actually murdered. While information on authors and works referred to in the texts is often provided in the footnotes, at times the reader is also left alone with unexplained names that occur in the texts. The non-specialist might possibly wonder who, e.g., “Enderunlu Vasif” or “Scheich Muhiddin-i Arabi” were and what the “Hadikatüssüeda” is (all p. 13). In quite a few instances, a little more information would have been desirable.

The choice of texts, as the editor emphasizes, is arbitrary; it is clear that a one-volume work must be highly selective. The selection however is very convincing and includes a few extremely interesting and valuable texts, the diversity of which not only the “general reader”, but also the specialist will benefit from. Trivial writings that would have been dispensable are the exception. Many of the texts are fragmentary and only very loosely interconnected by the historical context. Through their combination however, the mosaic pieces ultimately result in something that appears as a coherent whole.

Almost all texts are excerpts and have been shortened here and there in order to make them more easily digestible for the reader. This is of course a concession to the non-specialist target group; however, this sometimes results in the loss of the original Turkish character, which as a matter of fact tends to be a little longwinded time and again. In a few instances, the shortening has not been carried out in the most felicitous fashion. The reader is sometimes irritated by passages that appear truncated and incomplete (e.g. Tanpınar’s exposition on “The novels in our country”, p. 120–122, in which much ink is spilled in order to raise a number of problems, while only a part of Tanpınar’s answers is given before the text breaks off). In some cases, it would have been better to try the reader’s patience a bit more and deliver a coherent text in return.

As a whole, this volume provides a collection of at times highly interesting writings from which by no means only the general reader interested in literature will benefit, but in which also the specialist will discover many interesting, partly enjoyable, partly moving or even shocking details.