

ELEMENTS OF HISTORICAL NOVEL IN JURJI ZAYDAN'S İSTİBDAD AL-MAMALİK AND NAMİK KEMAL'S JEZMİ¹

By Assoc. Prof. Dr. Bedrettin Aytaç

özet:

19.yy. sonu 20.yy. başını kapsayan dönemde Mısır'da, Suriye ve Lübnan asıllı hıristiyan Arap yazarlarca çok sayıda tarihi roman yazılmıştır. Bu romanlarla, Arap okuyucusunun dikkatinin tarihe çevrilmesi ve tarih yoluyla bir milli bilinç oluşturulması amaçlanmıştır. Tanzimat dönemini yaşayan Türk edebiyatında da, zor zamanlar geçiren Osmanlı toplumuna, geçmişin büyüklüğünü yansıtmak, tarihten güç almak için tarihi romanlara bir yöneliş olmuştur. Aynı dönemlerde yazılan ve Osmanlı tarihinin farklı dönemlerini konu alan, Corcî Zeydân'ın *İstibdâdu'l-Memâlik* ve Namık Kemal'in *Cezmi* adlı eserleri, tarihi roman unsurları ve vermek istedikleri mesajlar bakımından karşılaştırılabilir özellikler taşımaktadır.

in the early periods of the Arab novel, as well as the Turkish one, the historical novels played an important role, and it is worth to mention that both literal pieces had fully adopted the novel tradition of Western literature, in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, a considerable number of historical novels were written in Egypt. These novels had given historical matters more emphasis than literary elements.³ it is well known that a majority of those pieces were penned down by Christian Arab intellectuals to provoke the Arab national feelings and to remind the Arab people ~ who are not well off at that time, — of their glorious past. These Syrian-Lebanese origin Christian immigrant intellectuals in Egypt at that time had strong ties with the western world and culture and eager to create an Arab

¹ This paper was submitted on XXXVI. ICANAS Congress in Montreal, Canada.

² Ankara University, Faculty of Language, History and Geography Department of Arabic Language and Literature.

³ see Rahmi Er, *Modern Mısır Romanı (1914-1944)*, Ankara 1997, p.56-59.

cultural awakening.⁴ They considered writing historical novels as an important tool to reach their goals. Jurji Zaydan⁵ (1861-1914) and Farah Antun(1874-1922) are worth to mention as pioneers of this literary form in the Egyptian literature. Both writers had chosen the themes of their historical novels from the Islamic history, despite they were not muslim. Jurji Zaydan, who worked as a journalist at the newspapers, *al-Zaman* and *al-Mugtatafin* Cairo after he immigrated from Beirut, established his own literary magazine, *al-HilaJ'in* 1892. It is remarkable that Jurji Zaydan had chosen the title al-Hilal, in other words "crescent," which is an Islamic symbol, for his literary magazine. Zaydan has also written several books on the Islamic and Arabic history as well as on civilization, but he gained his major fame with his historical novels, influenced by Walter Scott and Alexandre Dumas père.⁶ These historical novels contributed to the development of the literary Arabic novels also. Similarly, the Turkish literature of the same period witnessed the appearance of historical novels. The novel writers of Tanzimat, also dealt with historical matters to remind the people the brilliant past of the Ottoman Empire which was on the verge of collapse at that time and the magnificent periods of the Islamic history.⁷ Namik Kemal(1840-1888)⁸ and Ahmed Midhat Efendi (1844-1912) are early Turkish historical novel writers. The influence of the historical novels by Walter Scott is quite clear also on the early Turkish historical novels.⁹

⁴ see Jacob M. Landau, *Modern Arap Edebiyatı Tarihi (20. Yüzyıl)* (Çev.Dr.Bedrettin Aytac), Ankara 1994, p.17,18.

⁵ see Cari Brockelmann, *Geschichte der Arabischen Literatur, Supplementbmd, III*, E.J.Brill, Leiden 1942, p. 186-190.

⁶ see J.Brugman, *An Introduction to the History of Modern Arabic Literature in Egypt*, Leiden 1984, p. 219-222, 226.

⁷ see Hülya Eraydın Argunşah, *Türk Edebiyatında Tarihi Roman (Türk Tarihiyle İlgili)*, (Doktora Tezi), Marmara Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, İstanbul 1990, p. 14,15.

⁸ see Ömer Faruk Akün, "Namık Kemal" *İslam Ansiklopedisi, IX*, Milli Eğitim Basımevi, İstanbul 1988, p.54-72.

⁹ see Hülya Eraydın Argunşah, o.c. p.6; Sadri Ertem, *Tarihsel Roman, Roman Anlayışı (Haz. Baha Dürder)*, Remzi Kitabevi, İstanbul 1971, p. 120-123.

Jurji Zaydan's *Istibdad al-Mamalik*⁰ was one of his 22 historical novels. it is set in Egypt and Syria at the end of the 18th century and was written in 1893. The novel, which was written by third narrative style, deals with the sufferings and problems of the Egyptian people under the Mamelukes as the Ottoman rule in the area loses grip. The historical data about Egypt in the first chapter of the novel, titled *Vikalat al-Sabun*, were provided in the light of the abovementioned facts. According to these data, Egypt had been ruled by many Sultans after the Fatimide period, but the worst sufferings of the Egyptian people were experienced after the Mamelukes took over the administration of the country. Following the end of Mameluke rule by the Ottoman Empire, Egypt has been ruled by Pashas who were appointed by Istanbul, Mameluke beys and the military — the *Ojaks*. The person in charge of the governorate in Cairo has been called *Sheikh al-Balad*. The protagonist of the novel, Abd al-Rahman is a merchant who is in a respected position in Cairo's *Vikalat al-Sabun* quarter. in addition, he is a good and generous person. He is married to Salima and fathers a son named Hasan who receives medical training at that time. Ali Bey al-Kabir, who is Sheikh al-Balad at that time, is a ruthless and greedy administrator, and he is dreaming to be a sovereign power in Egypt with the support of Russia. He collects unfair taxes from his subjects through his loyal servants. in one of such brutal practices, Ali Bey's soldiers arrest the protagonist's wife and son, in false charges that he escaped compulsory military service. Later, Ali Bey al-Kabir orders their execution, but somehow his soldiers feel pity and release the mother and son. As the story approaches to an end, Hasan and Salima manage to arrive in Acre to meet Abd al-Rahman after so much suffering and countless struggles, and the family reunites. At this time Ali Bey's Mameluke army is defeated by the pro-Ottoman forces of Abu al-Zahab Muhammad Bey. Ali Bey is killed in that battle. Following these developments, Abd al-Rahman goes back to Cairo with his family and they spend the rest of their lives there.

The abovementioned novel, comprises a significant historical structure. The events taking place in the book are supported with

¹⁰ see Matti Moussa, *The Origins of Modern Arabic Fiction*, A Three Continents Book Lynne Rienner Publishers Boulder, London 1997, p.208,209.

certain dates. The despotic Mameluke rulers are clearly depicted by al-Mahruki, a friend of Abd al-Rahman:

"It is weird that they daim to belong to islam, but islam can not be associated with either those people or their deeds, which even Pharaohs and Mercusions would not dare. It's true, that the Turkish Pashas have lost their power and the last word is /e/î to the Mamelukes."

The novel informs its readers about the general conditions in Egypt in the late 18th Century as seen here: *"At this time the Orthodox Greeks had so many privileges in Egypt, because the Mamelukes were dependent on their skills and knowledge about medicine, silk trade, navigation and shipbuilding"*¹²

Also the novel gives us some ideas about the port-city of Alexandria then:

*"At that time, Alexandria was a sinai I town. Most importantly, it was on the sea shore, and it had two separate harbors. One ofthem was located in Ras at-Tin and it was for the use of only Muslims. There anchored only Ottoman and Egyptian boats. The other was for the use of the Christians, and was located in an area called 'the Old Harbor."*¹³

The Mamelukes' oppressive rule is illustrated as much as possible. As the soldiers take Abd al-Rahman's wife, Salima to a Greek Orthodox church to hide her after deciding not to kili her, they are mistakenby the churchstaffas 'plunderers.'¹⁴

There is another incident about a conversation betveen Hasan, Abd al-Rahjnan's son, and a priest at *Saint Ilya* monastery in Beirut. The conversation follovs as:

*"Wepray to Allah that may Be destroy the administration of the Mamelukes. The history has never before witnessed any more brutal, ruthless and oppressive rulers than them."*¹⁵

¹¹ Jurji Zaydan, *Istibdadal-Mamalik*, Daral-Hilal, p.40.

¹² *ibid.*p.78

¹³ *ibid.*p.109.

¹⁴ see *ibid* 79.

¹⁵ *ibid.*p. 200.

Aside from the history of Egypt, some historical background about Syria is given as well. That can be observed as the novel introduces al-Sheikh Dahir al-Zaydani.¹⁶

There are also some details of Osman Pasha's efforts to persuade Abu al-Zahab, who recaptured Hejaz from the rebels in order to remain loyal to the Ottoman Sultan in İstanbul. There he says:

"The Queen Of Russia hashelpedyou to overcome the Muslims [in the Baïkans] in order to satisfy her goals there. Imagine that you take Hejaz and Syria. What significance does this small piece of territory bear when compared to the much broader Ottoman Empire? How can be the [relatively smaller] armies of Hejaz and Syria be a match for the powerful Ottoman armies which conquered the world with ali their courage and strength".¹⁷

in general, we can comment from this novel that the administration in istanbul loses control Egypt and there exist proper conditions for the upcoming Napoleonic armies to invade the region.

The characters, like Ali Bey al-Kabir, Osman Pasha, Muhammad Bey Abu al-Zahab, Amir Yusuf al-Shihab, al-Sheikh Dahir al-Zaydani and Russian Admiral Orloff are the real historical personalities.¹⁸ On the other hand, the novel fictionalizes humanistic qualities like separation, longing and charity. Abd al-Rahman's longing for his wife and son, as well as his reunion with them through the help of the other supporting characters, play an important role in the story's development. Description of the novel characters are very poor and insufficient. Even main character Abd al-Rahman's description is so insufficient. The author did not try to picturize us the inner selves of the characters. That causes a poor fictive structure in the novel. The author positively approaches Abd al-Rahman and Admiral Orloff who supported him, and al-Sheikh Dahir al-Zaydani. We can say that the author does not describe the characters in realistic terms. The characters are depicted as either extremely good or extremely bad personalities.

¹⁶ see *ibid.* p.1 15.

¹⁷ *ibid.* p. 162.

¹⁸ see ismail Hakkı Uzunçarşılı, *Osmanlı Tarihi, IV*, T.T.K. Yayınları, Ankara 1988, p.431,434.

Similarly Namik Kemal, one of the most significant writers and poets of the late Ottoman period, considered literature as a way to provoke nationalist feelings and relay his politically motivated messages. One of his novels presents historical settings for this purpose. The novel, called *Jezmi*,¹⁹ was written in 1877, but it takes place in the 16th Century Iran and the Black Sea peninsula of Crimea.

Although, Jezmi himself appears to be the protagonist of the novel; after some reading, we begin to confirm that another character, Adil Giray from Crimea, displays a more eminent feature. Jezmi, when compared to Adil Giray, has a less visible role in that work. In that novel, as in many other historical novels, we observe the failing nations' yearning to return their glorious past. The novelist chose 16th Century as the time setting, most probably because that time period represents the zenith of the Ottoman Empire.

As it is the case for the previous novel, Jezmi also provides its readers with some historical background of the setting. In abstract; Jezmi, originally a poet, willingly takes part in an Ottoman war against Iran, and he heroically serves the army. The Ottoman army helps the allied Crimean forces against the Iranians, and saves Crimean commander Adil Giray from being defeated by his enemies. Later on, the Iranians launch another strike, and the Crimeans and imprison Adil Giray in that second attempt. There begins a love affair involving a trio. Both the Iranian Shah's wife, Shahriyar and his sister Perihan fall in love with Adil Giray at the same time. After the war, Jezmi also goes to Iran volunteering in an attempt to rescue Adil Giray from the Iranians. There the two characters meet for the first time. But tragically, Adil Giray and his lover Perihan are killed by the Iranian guards by the order of Shahriyar at the end of the story.

The novel which was written by third person narrative style, presents us several historical facts: The first of those facts is the war between the Ottoman Empire and Iran which took place in about 1578, despite the then-Ottoman grand vizier, Mehmed Sokollu was in objection to such a costly military offensive. Secondly, Crimean Khan Mehmed Giray's brother Adil Giray aligned with the Ottoman empire against the Iranians. In addition, there is a mention of an actual attack

¹⁹ see Sadık Kemal Tural, Tarihi Roman Geleneği veya Cezmi, *Doğumunun Yüzellinci Yılında Namık Kemal*, Atatürk Kültür, Dil ve Tarih Yüksek Kurumu Yayınları, Ankara 1993, p. 67-91.

against the Ottoman army by the forces of a regional Azeri commander, imam Kuli Khan who was aligned with the Iranians at the same time.²⁰ The magnificence of Mehmed Sokullu's era has a special emphasis in Jezmi. His success and superior statesmanship are many times stressed in the novel. There is also some mention of the evident conspiracies and mismanagement in the palace in Istanbul, which were the clear signs of the upcoming recession period of the Ottoman Empire.

As for Jezmi and Adil Giray, both of them are poets. There is a clear reflection of the author's real life experiences on both of these characters, because Namik Kemal himself is also a poet.

As most of the Romanticists who perceive poets as extraordinary people and passionate guides, Namik Kemal describes a poet as: "*A creature made up of melancholic smiles in the nature's most passionate times for love.*"²¹

Stressing how unfortunate a poet's destiny appears, — since he wants to overcome the nature despite he is confined by it, — Namik Kemal makes an analogy by using the case of a hawk and a nightingale. According to him, a poet dreams about being a hawk, but when he realizes that he is not strong enough for that, he begins to cry like a nightingale locked in a cage. According to him, a poet is not someone who can "*versify five to ten words using prosody or turn a few words into rhymes*"²². So, a poet's "*passionate guidance,*" in Namik Kemal's words, lead him to introduce Jezmi and Adil Giray as both poets and warriors. In order to demonstrate that approach, I would like to read you a few quotes from a dialogue between Jezmi and Nev'i, another great poet of that time.

Jezmi tells Nev'i that he would like to participate in the war against Iran. Nev'i responds him with a smile: "*Son, fighting is not like writing poem.*"

Then Jezmi says, : "Why not? Isn't man capable of fighting as much as writing. The quill I am grabbing with my hand seems to me more uncontrollable than my black horse."

²⁰ see Yasar Yücel, Ali Sevim, *Türkiye Tarihi*,3, Türk Tarih Kurumu Yayınları, Ankara 1991, p. 22.

²¹ Namik Kemal, *Cezmi*, İnkılap ve Aka Kitabevleri, Ankara 1984, p.22.

²² *ibid.*p. 22.

Nev'i continues to smile: "I think you are going to teach poets how to practice with swords. Is there any way one can write poems with blood?"

Jezmi replies: "Then what would you say about Abdallah bin Ravaha?"²³

Jezmi here clearly mirrors some particularities attributed to Namik Kemal himself, both as a poet and an ardent warrior who would zealously fight for his country. The author does not only bring our attentions to the patriotism demonstrated by such subjects of the Ottoman Empire, but also to those loyalties by autonomies such as the Crimean Khanate which aligned with Istanbul during the most powerful times of the Empire. One of the novel's positively portrayed characters, Crimean commander Adil Giray considers the survival of the Ottoman Empire over his own, believing that it secures the Islamic unity.

Quite similar to Namik Kemal's portrayal, Jezmi, in fact a real-life character was one of the firebrands of the cavalry rebellion which took place in the early 17th Century Ottoman Empire. Several characters in the novel, like Jezmi, Adil Giray and Pertev were portrayed positively while Shahriyar and Mirza Süleyman were presented as malicious people. Like in the previous novel, all characters here are either too good or too bad. We observe the contrast between characters in a comparison made in the novel between Perihan and Shahriyar: *"When compared to Perihan's beauty which resembles a blossoming rosebud, Shahriyar's chann cannot not be distinguished from the blooming of an oleander tree. She was completely opposite of Perihan morally and emotionally. She would consider her personal interests above all."*²⁴

Perihan on the other hand, was portrayed in the novel as *"a unique beauty of the world. She is around 18 or 19 years of age and was created by God with particular care. Both morally and characteristically she has no other match. She is brave and strong, and at the same time she has nerves as hard as a steel rod."*²⁵ This

²³ *ibid.*p. 58.

²⁴ *ibid.*p.25, 26.

²⁵ *ibid.*p.25.

exaggerated style of Namik Kemal can be considered as a trace of his romanticist quality.

The author has a distinctive habit of giving more emphasis to details. That of course, gives the novel more energy. On one hand, the author portrays Jezmi more with his inner self, on the other hand he presents Adil Giray more with his physical appearance.

Namik Kemal's narrative style in Jezmi contains romantic irony. in some cases he just interferes with the fictitious flow of the novel, taking over as the narrator. in addition he provides quotes from some famous eastern writers and poets, such as al-Jahiz and Sheikh Galib.

in conclusion, each novel comprises a thesis. Jurji Zaydan's Istibdad al-Mamalik can be interpreted as a political argument. He defends that the Mameluke rulers mistreated the people of Egypt while the Ottoman administration was losing strength. He tries to show how Egyptian people, regardless they are Müslim or Christian, suffered under the pressures of the Mamelukes. Here, he brings attentions to a period, in which Ottoman Empire's province of Egypt witnessed turbulence. in a different way, Namik Kemal combines politics with literature, so the poetic images he had drawn on the characters also reflect politically active personalities. According to him, the novel characters are poets voluntarily taking part in wars. This is the way Namik Kemal wants to see politics and literature hand in hand in order to secure the survival of the Ottoman Empire and the Islamic unity. His deliberate way of stressing that notion in the introductory pages of his book, clearly demonstrates his starting point. He spends more time in portraying fictional characters - even in a more exaggerated way — than Jurji Zaydan. The two novels that we have dealt with, the two early works of the Arab and Turkish historical novels, resemble each other in a way that every historical novel comprise a thesis. That is the case for each novel we have studied, despite both of them lack in technique since they are the early adaptations of the Western historical novel.

Bibliography:

Akün ,Ömer Faruk, "Namık Kemal", *İslam Ansiklopedisi*, IX, Milli Eğitim Basımevi, İstanbul 1988, p.54-72.

Argunşah, Hülya Eraydın, *Türk Edebiyatında Tarihi Roman (Türk Tarihiyle İlgili)*, (Doktora Tezi), Marmara Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, İstanbul 1990.

Brockehnann, Cari, *Geschichte der Arabischen Literatur*, Supplementband, III, E.J.Brill, Leiden 1942, p 186-190.

Brugman, J., *an Introduction to the History Of Modern Arabic Literature in Egypt*, E.J.Brill, Leiden 1984.

Er, Rahmi, *Modern Mısır Romanı (1914-1944)*, Ankara 1997.

Moussa, Matti, *The Origins Of Modern Arabic Fiction* (Second Edition), A Three Continents Book Lynne Rienner Publishers Boulder London 1997.

Namık Kemal , *Cezmi* (Günümüz Türkçesi Seyit Kemal Karaalioğlu), İnkılap ve Aka Kitabevleri, 1984.

Tural, Sadık, Tarihi Roman Geleneği Veya Cezmi, *Doğumunun Yüzellinci Yılında Namık Kemal*, A.K.D.T.Y.K. Yayınlan, Ankara 1993, p.67-91.

Uzunçarşılı, *ismail Hakkı, Osmanlı Tarihi, IV*, T.T.K. Yayınlan, Ankara 1988.

Yücel, Yaşar, Sevim, Ali, *Türkiye Tarihi, 3*, T.T.K. Yayınları, Ankara 1991.

Zaydan, Jurji, *Istibdadal-Mamalik*, Dar al-Hilal