



## The Academic Study of Religion in Türkiye At Its Centenary: A Snapshot Assesment of Recent Scholarship

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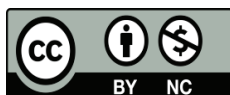
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**Abstract:** Today studies of religion in Türkiye are represented mostly in the academic structure of the Faculties of Theology and Islamic Studies, and their number outnumbers a hundred. Türkiye has a century-old tradition of modern studies of religions, with a substantial output of scholarship. However, there is no proper treatment of the Turkish legacy of religious studies in Western scholarship. This essay argues that the scholarly output of Türkiye on religious studies has always been significant, both qualitatively and quantitatively. It also provides a general assessment of the field in terms of its contribution to relevant scholarship and offers some insights. Prof. Hikmet Tanyu completed the first Ph.D. degree in the field at Ankara University in 1959. Although the study of religions in Türkiye has roots back to 1874, this date is generally considered the beginning of the continuous existence of the History of Religions in Turkish universities. Tanyu and his students dreamed creating a legacy of the History of Religions in Turkish, by Turkish-Muslim scholars, a trustworthy "territory" of fine scholarship. Therefore, they mostly preferred general topics, as they want to lay the foundations of a new field in Türkiye. This research on the studies of religion in Türkiye, and its review of some exemplary recent studies reveal that there is still a general tendency of "laying foundations", albeit several fine exceptions, in various major subjects related to world religions. This prospect inevitably brings general, introductory studies, which tends to transfer data rather than making critical contributions to scholarship. What they generally end up doing is little more than transferring the data provided by western scholarship. Therefore, the article suggests that new scholars should leave this habit and focus on more critical studies that produce new knowledge.

**Keywords:** History of Religions, Study of Religions in Türkiye, Faculties of Islamic Studies/Theology in Türkiye, Hikmet Tanyu, World Religions.



## Yüzüncü Yılında Türkiye’de Dinler Tarihi: Mevcut Durum Analizi

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<b>Makale Türü:</b>	Araştırma Makalesi
<b>Etik Beyan:</b>	Bu çalışmanın hazırlanma sürecinde bilimsel ve etik ilkelere uyulduğu ve yararlanılan tüm çalışmaların kaynakçada belirtildiği beyan olunur. Bu çalışma, 18-20 Ekim 2024 tarihlerinde İslam Araştırmaları Merkezi (İSAM) tarafından düzenlenen “Türkiye’de İlahiyat Fakültelerinin 100. Yılı” başlıklı sempozyumda Türkçe olarak sunulan “Türkiye’de Dinler Tarihi Çalışmalarının 100. Yılında Bir Değerlendirme” başlıklı tebliğin genişletilmiş hâlidir. Tebliğ, daha sonra yeni araştırmalar ve eklemelerle geliştirilmiş ve İngilizce bir makaleye dönüştürülmüştür.
<b>Etik Kurul İzni:</b>	Araştırma için herhangi bir etik onay veya bilgilendirilmiş onam gerekmemektedir.
<b>Geliş Tarihi:</b>	21 Haziran 2025
<b>Kabul Tarihi:</b>	17 Kasım 2025
<b>Yayın Tarihi:</b>	30 Kasım 2025
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<b>Değerlendirme:</b>	Çift Taraflı Kör Hakemlik
<b>Benzerlik Taraması:</b>	Yapıldı- intihal.net
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<b>Finansman:</b>	Herhangi bir fon, hibe veya başka bir destek alınmamıştır.
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**Öz:** Türkiye’de din çalışmaları kahir ekseriyetle, toplam sayıları yüzü aşan İlahiyat ya da İslami İlimler fakültelerinin akademik yapısı içinde temsil edilmektedir. Türkiye’nin yüzyılı aşan ömrüyle muazzam bir bilimsel din araştırmaları (*religious studies*) müktesebatı vardır. Ancak Batı literatüründe bu yadsınamaz muazzam birikimi yeterince ele alan bir çalışma bulunmamaktadır. Elinizdeki makale Türkiye’de Dinler Tarihi sahasındaki bilimsel üretimin başlangıcından itibaren nitelik ve nicelik bakımından ihmal edilemez düzeyde önemli olduğunu iddia etmektedir. Makale sahada yapılan çalışmaları genel olarak değerlendirmekte, özellikle yakın zamanda yapılan çalışmaları dikkate alarak bazı tespit ve önerilerde bulunmaktadır. Her ne kadar Türkiye’de Dinler Tarihi’nin başlangıcı 1874’te Dar’ül Fünûn edebiyat fakültesinde “Tarih-i Umumî ve İlm-i Esatîr-i Evveliyin” adlı dersin konulmasına kadar geriye giden bir tarihe sahipse de, Prof. Hikmet Tanyu’nun ilk Dinler Tarihi doktoraşını tamamladığı 1959 tarihi genellikle Türkiye üniversitelerinde Dinler Tarihi alanının kesintisiz varlığının başlangıcı kabul edilir. Tanyu ve öğrencileri Türk ve Müslüman Dinler Tarihçileri tarafından üretilmiş Türkçe bir Dinler Tarihi mirası oluşturmak ve güvenilir ve iyi yapılmış çalışmalardan oluşan bir Dinler Tarihi alanı inşa etmek istediler. Bu nedenle genellikle ülkemizde yeni ortaya çıkan bir sahaya zemin oluşturacak giriş mahiyetinde çalışmalar yapıldı. Türkiye’deki Dinler Tarihi çalışmaları üzerindeki araştırmalarımız ve örnek olarak seçtiğimiz tezleri incelememiz neticesinde, Türkiye’de hala “sahaya zemin oluşturma” alışkanlığının devam ettiğini görmekteyiz. Bu bakış açısı kaçınılmaz olarak genel ve giriş mahiyetinde çalışmaları ortaya çıkarmakta ve bu çalışmalar da orijinal bilimsel katkı yapmaktan ziyade Batıdaki literatürü Türkçe’ye aktarmaya neden olmaktadır. Bunu söylerken hatırı sayılır miktarda çalışmanın bu eğilime istisna oluşturacak içerik ve derinliğe sahip olduğunu da gözden kaçırmamalıyız. Bu nedenle, yeni araştırmacıların bu alışkanlığı terk etmelerini, bilimsel üretim ortaya çıkarabilecek eleştirel çalışmalara ve konulara yönelmesini önermekteyiz. Bu sayede Türkiye’de dinler tarihi sahası dünyada hakettiği yere kavuşacak ve bir ekol, özgün bir yaklaşım haline gelebilecektir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Dinler Tarihi, Türkiye’de Din Çalışmaları, Dinler Tarihi, Türkiye’de İlahiyat Fakülteleri, Hikmet Tanyu, Dünya Dinleri.

## Introduction:

As the most comprehensive, standard reference work produced by modern scholarship on religion, Mircea Eliade's *The Macmillan Encyclopedia of Religion* of 1987 has a revised second edition of 2005 by Lindsay Jones.<sup>[1]</sup> This revised edition has a comprehensive coverage of the study of religion throughout the globe.<sup>[2]</sup> Gregory D. Alles, the author of the overview article, seems to criticize the domination of European and North American scholarship, i.e. the western, over the modern studies on religion, on account of their eurocentrism and ethnocentrism, and feels the need to incorporate the contributions of other parts of the world. Therefore, instead of monopolizing the western narrative of the birth and development of *Religionswissenschaft*, he prefers a global narrative.<sup>[3]</sup> Studies of Religion in countries such as Australia, Japan and the Eastern Europe get full coverage, and Türkiye gets its place in "The Study of Religion in North Africa and the Middle East".<sup>[4]</sup> However, within this entry, countries such as Morocco, Saudi Arabia and Egypt get quite detailed analyses, whereas Türkiye is referred through only a brief sentence. This unfair treatment reveals that neither the author of the related article, nor his editor cared to conduct necessary research for the significant legacy of modern studies in Türkiye, which arguably represents the most significant output in the entire Muslim world. This seems to be an ironic example of how Western scholars can be Eurocentric even when they avowedly reject it; for not only are the majority of the regions covered are former European colonies, but also the histories of their respected scholarship on religion are dominated by Europeans in various capacities (missionaries being the most common group).

The purpose of this critical essay is to make a general evaluation and assessment of the field of the History of Religions in Türkiye, its contribution to scholarship, since its beginning as an independent field in the faculties of theology since 1924. I will shortly evaluate its historical development in Türkiye, its status quo, contribution to scholarship and conclude with some suggestions to increase its potential for better scholarly output. As a scholar of the History of Religions, I am already familiar with most of the major developments and scholarly-endeavours in the field; however, in order to better engage with the subject, I thoroughly reviewed the previous studies on the subject.<sup>[5]</sup> Similarly, in order to appreciate the current situation of the studies, I

[1] Lindsay Jones (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Religion* (New York: Thompson and Gale, 2nd ed., 2005).

[2] Under the "Study of Religion" entry (13/8761-8796), the following articles covers a global overview of the study of religions: "An Overview" (by Gregory D. Alles, 13/8761-8767), "The Academic Study of Religion in Australia and Oceania" (by Garry W. Trompf, 13/8767-8771), "The Academic Study of Religion in Eastern Europe and Russia" (by Bretislav Horyna, 13/8771-8775), "The Academic Study of Religion in Japan" (by Sakoto Fujivara, 13/8775-8780), "The Academic Study of Religion in North Africa and the Middle East" (by Brannon Wheeler, 13/8780-8784), "The Academic Study of Religion in North America" (by Jeffrey C. Ruff, 13/8784-8789), "The Academic Study of Religion in South Asia" (by Abraham H. Khan, 13/8789-8792), "The Academic Study of Religion in Sub-Saharan Africa" (by Ezra Chitando, 13/8792-8796).

[3] Alles, "Study of Religion: An Overview", 13/8761.

[4] "This corresponds with the growing number of Turkish and North African universities that have begun to offer a curriculum aimed explicitly at participating in dialogue with non-Muslim societies." (Wheeler, "The Academic Study of Religion in North Africa and the Middle East", 13/8780.)

[5] On the history of the study of religions in Türkiye see, Fuat Aydın, *Osmanlı Mektep ve Medreselerinde Târih-i Edyân Dersleri ve Kitapları* (Ankara: Eskiyei Yayınları, 2024); İsmet Eşmeli, "Tanzimattan Günümüze Dinler Tarihi İlmî", *Tanzimattan Moderniteye Geçiş Bağlamında Türkiye'de Dini Eğitim*, ed. Seyfullah Kaya - Salih Akbey (Ankara: İlahiyat Yayınları, 2022), 137-160; Bülent Şenay, "Religious Studies and the Study of Islam in Modern Turkish Academia", *Journal of Intercultural and Religious Studies* (2012/2), 7-44. Cengiz Batuk, "Türkiye'de Dinler Tarihi Çalışmalarının Tarihî Seyri", *Dinbilimleri Akademik Araştırma Dergisi* 9/1 (2009), 71-97; Ali İsmâ Güngör, "The Turkish Contribution to the History of Religions", *Numen* 54/1 (2007), 71-92; Galip Atasagun, "Türkiye'de Dinler Tarihi Çalışmaları", *Selçuk Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 20/2 (2005), 203-248; Jacques Waardenburg, "Observations on the Scholarly Study of Religions as Pursued in Some Muslim Countries", *Numen* 45/3 (1998), 235-257; Harun Güngör, "Dinler Tarihçisi Olarak Prof. Dr. Hikmet Tanyu ve Türk Dini Tarihi Çalışmalarına Katkısı" *Ankara Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 36/1-2 (1997), 521-529; Baki Adam, "Hikmet Tanyu'dan Günümüze Türkiye'de Dinler Tarihi", *Ankara Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 36 (1997), 509-19; Abdurrahman Küçük, "Türkiye'de Dinler Tarihi Çalışmaları ve Prof. Dr. Hikmet Tanyu", *Erciyes Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi* 5 (1994), 21-30; Mustafa Erdem, "Türkiye'de Dinler Tarihi Sahasında Yapılmış Lisansüstü Tezler Üzerine Düşünceler", *Türkiye 1. Dinler Tarihi Araştırmaları Sempozyumu*, (Samsun, 1992), 83-95; Hikmet Tanyu, "Türkiye'de Dinler Tarihinin Tarihçesi", *Ankara Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 8 (1961), 109-124.

reviewed 10 randomly chosen PhD theses, completed in the last 15 years, in order to establish a foundation for my evaluations and assessment.<sup>[6]</sup>

## 1. Overview of the Scholarly Output of the History of Religions in Türkiye

Prof. Hikmet Tanyu's<sup>[7]</sup> (1918-1992) article on the studies of the History of Religions dating back to 1961 gives a complete list of the studies in the field, the number of which was then around ten.<sup>[8]</sup> Mustafa Erdem's article penned in 1992 informs us that the number of completed graduate theses in the field was 33 then.<sup>[9]</sup> Today this figure outnumbers 700. The number of tenure or tenure-track scholars of the History of Religions in the faculties of theology and Islamic studies is close to 200. 44 volume *Diyanet Encyclopedia of Islam* has hundreds of entries related to the History of Religions, all novel researches held by Turkish Historians of Religion. There are hundreds of research monographs, edited volumes, translations as well as research papers. They all constitute the immense legacy of the Turkish scholarship on the History of Religions. Furthermore, compulsory and elective courses in the faculties of theology, Islamic studies and history enabled the production of several well-written text-books on the History of Religions as well as World Religions.<sup>[10]</sup> I believe that there is no second country in the entire Muslim world that takes religious studies so seriously. History of Religions is represented in all the Faculties of Theology<sup>[11]</sup> (İlahiyat Fakültesi) as an independent sub-department, and with a lesser representation in the Faculties of Islamic Studies<sup>[12]</sup> (İslami İlimler Fakültesi). Most of these faculties have independent or joint MA and PhD programs. In addition, Ankara University, Faculty of Divinity has opened up a "World Religions" BA program, which continued from 2007 until 2011 for five years and

[6] Alparslan Emin Öztürk, *Gustavo Gutiérrez'de Özgürlük Teolojisi* (Liberation theology in Gustavo Gutiérrez) (Rize: Recep Tayyip Erdoğan University, Institute of Post-Graduate Education, PhD thesis, 2024); Fatma Seda Şengül, *Yahudi-Hristiyan Münazaralarında İsa ve Mesih Tartışmaları-Paris, Barselona, Tortosa Örnekleri* (Bursa: Uludağ University, Institute of Social Sciences, PhD thesis, 2022) (*Debates about Jesus and the Messiah in Jewish-Christian Disputations-The cases of Paris, Barcelona, Tortosa-*); Yunus Kaymaz, *Hristiyan Teolojisinde Kutsal Ruh Tartışmaları (Kökeni, Mahiyeti ve Dogmatlaşma Süreci)*, (Sakarya: Sakarya University, Institute of Social Sciences, PhD thesis, 2021) (*Debates on the Holy Spirit in Christian theology (Origin, nature and the process of dogmatization)*); Mahmut Çoban, *Mitraizm'in Erken Dönem Hristiyanlığına Olası Etkileri*, (İstanbul: İstanbul University, Institute of Social Sciences, PhD thesis, 2021) (*Mithraism and its possible influences on early Christianity*); Bilal Toprak, *Din Arkeolojisinin İmkânı ve Göbeklitepe* (İstanbul: İstanbul University, Institute of Social Sciences, PhD thesis, 2019) (*The possibility of archaeology of religion and Göbeklitepe*); Özlem Topcan, *Pentekostal Hareket ve Afrika'daki Misyon Faaliyetleri (Nijerya Örneği)* (Ankara: Ankara University, Institute of Social Sciences, PhD thesis, 2018) (*Pentecostal movement and its mission activities in Africa (the case of Nigeria)*); Asım Duran, *Tarihsel-Eleştirel Yöntem Bağlamında Kitabı Mukaddes'in Anlaşılması Sorunu* (Samsun: Ondokuz Mayıs University, Institute of Social Sciences, PhD thesis, 2017) (*Understanding the Bible through historical-critical method*); Hüsamettin Karataş, *Nichiren Budizmi* (Ankara: Ankara University, Institute of Social Sciences, PhD thesis, 2012) (*Nichiren Buddhism*); Bumairimu Abudukelimu, *Çin Kaynaklarına Göre Taoizm* (Ankara: Ankara University, Institute of Social Sciences, PhD thesis, 2011) (*Taoism according to Chinese sources*); Süleyman Turan, *Misyondan Misyonoloji'ye: Misyonljinin Hristiyan Misyon Anlayışına Katkıları* (Samsun: Ondokuz Mayıs University, Institute of Social Sciences, PhD thesis, 2010) (*From mission to missiology: The contributions of missiology to Christian concept of mission*).

[7] For more information on Prof. Hikmet Tanyu's life and works see, Mustafa Alıcı, "Tanyu, Hikmet", *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslam Ansiklopedisi* (İstanbul: TDV Yayınları, 2010), 39/580-581.

[8] Tanyu, "Türkiye'de Dinler Tarihinin Tarihçesi", 120-124. Due to limited space, I avoid the period before Tanyu, which comprises between 1874 and 1959. For critical evaluation of the previous process, please refer to various fine scholarship listed in the bibliography.

[9] Erdem, "Türkiye'de Dinler Tarihi Sahasında Yapılmış Lisansüstü Tezler Üzerine Düşünceler," 85.

[10] For instance, Fuat Aydın-Feyza Betül Aydın (hazırlayanlar), *George Dumezil'den Târîhi Edyân Dersleri* (Ankara: Eskiyei Yayınları, 2012); Baki Adam (ed), *Dinler Tarihi El Kitabı* (Ankara: Grafiker Yayınları, 2020); Fuat Aydın, *Yahudilik* (İstanbul: Mahya Yayınları, 2023); Mahmut Aydın, *Dinler Tarihi* (İstanbul: Ensar Neşriyat, 2018); Mahmut Aydın, *Hristiyanlık: Tarih, İnanç ve Uygulama* (İstanbul: Ketebe Yayınları, 2021); Dursun Ali Aykıt - Ali Osman Kurt, *Dinler Tarihi* (Ankara: Bilay Yayınları, 2019); Kürşat Demirci, *Dinler Tarihinin Meseleleri* (İstanbul: İnsan Yayınları, 1997); Şinasi Gündüz (ed), *Dünya Dinleri* (İstanbul: Milet & Nihal Yayınları, 2019); Şinasi Gündüz, *Hristiyanlık* (İstanbul: İSAM Yayınları, 2021); Ali İsra Güngör (ed), *Dinlerarası İlişkiler El Kitabı* (Ankara: Grafiker Yayınları, 2017); Salime Leyla Gürkan, *Yahudilik* (İstanbul: İSAM Yayınları, 9. Basım, 2022); Amjad M. Hussain, *The Study of Religions: An Introduction* (İstanbul: M.Ü. İlahiyat Fakültesi Yayınları, 2015); Yasin Meral, *Yahudi Kaynakları Işığında Yahudilik* (İstanbul: Milet & Nihal Yayınları, 2021); Fuat Aydın, *Hint Dinlerine Giriş* (Ankara: Eskiyei Yayınları, 2022).

[11] As of today, the Turkish Higher Education Council (YÖK) gives their number as 79.

[12] There are 31 of them according to the Turkish Higher Education Council (YÖK).

graduated about a hundred students. The program focused mostly on the World Religions, with several courses on Islamic studies in the first two years.

The History of Religions has always been attractive to the public. Among other fields of religious studies, the History of Religions is arguably the most popular; therefore, scholars of the field are very often on TV screens and other media outlets. Books on the History of Religions are highly popular on bookstores' shelves.

During the 1990's, when the author of this essay first began his career, one could easily follow the publications of the historians of religions in Türkiye; however, today it is almost impossible to follow their works, for their number has increased so much. The subject matter of the publications also progressed from more general introductory works to various major religions to more specific studies on certain aspects of a variety of religious traditions. In particular, the trend for specialization is more visible for Judaism and Christianity.

## 2. A Bird's-Eye History of the "History of Religions" in Türkiye

Since I intend to evaluate recent scholarship, it is beyond the aims of the paper here to provide a detailed history of studies of the History of Religions in Türkiye; one can refer to related literature for a detailed history.<sup>[13]</sup> However, one should be reminded that the history of

the field in Türkiye is almost as old as modern studies of religion in the West. The establishment of the chair of *Religionwissenschaft* in Genova in the year of 1873 or the publication of F. Max Muller's book *Introduction to the Science of Religion* in the same year mark the beginning of the History of Religions.<sup>[14]</sup> A year after these, a course on the History of Religions, *Tarih-i Umumî İlmi Esatiri Evvelin* (General History and Mythology), was opened in the Faculty of Arts of the Daru'l Fünûn, the first modern university of the Ottoman state.<sup>[15]</sup> History of Religions was a compulsory course in the Faculty of Theology, which opened in 1924. After this faculty was closed in 1933, the Institution of Islamic Studies (Islam Tetkikleri Enstitüsü) was established but lasted only three years; where the same course was offered.

The real and uninterrupted lifespan of the History of Religions in Türkiye begins with the establishment of the Faculty of Divinity at Ankara University in 1949. The course was taught by Annemarie Schimmel, a German scholar of Islam, from 1954 to 1959<sup>[16]</sup>. Prof. Hikmet Tanyu became the first Turkish PhD student of the History of Religions under Schimmel, who completed his degree in 1959. Prof. Tanyu proved himself as a pivotal figure in the development of the field, as his graduate students became the first academics of the field in Türkiye. History of Religions became an independent sub-department in Ankara University, Faculty of Divinity in 1992. Other faculties of theology followed suit. Today academics of the third and fourth generations serve in various capacities in the Faculties of Theology and Islamic Studies, while the fifth generation is writing their graduate theses.

Historians of Religions in Türkiye have always followed the Western scholarship on religions. We observe that in each generation, their abilities and skills in following the Western literature and engaging the source material are increasing. In addition to Western languages like English and French, many scholars can now read many archaic languages such as Arabic, Hebrew, Latin, Greek, Sanskrit, Mandarin, Japanese and Syriac and apply to them in their studies.

[13] See Batuk, "Türkiye'de Dinler Tarihi Çalışmalarının Tarihsel Seyri", 71-97; Eşmeli, "Tanzimattan Günümüze Dinler Tarihi İlmî", 137-160; Güngör, "The Turkish Contribution to the History of Religions", 71-92.

[14] Eric Sharpe, *Comparative Religion: A History* (London: Duckworth, 2nd ed., 2003), xi.

[15] Batuk, "Türkiye'de Dinler Tarihi Çalışmalarının Tarihsel Seyri", 73.

[16] For Annemarie Schimmel see, Senail Özkan, "Schimmel, Annemarie", *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslam Ansiklopedisi* (İstanbul: TDV Yayınları, 2009), 36/229-231.



In his 1997 essay on religious studies in Türkiye, Prof. Baki Adam enumerates the major areas of study that Prof. Hikmet Tanyu gave to his PhD students and the titles of the graduate theses completed at that time. The following areas of study are listed as intriguing to the first and second generations of scholars: the religious history of the Turks, Muslim contribution to the History of Religions, religious polemics/apologies and introductory works on Judaism, Christianity and some other World religions.<sup>[17]</sup> We observe that today, the same set of subjects is studied in addition to different, contemporary and other important subjects.

Prof. Tanyu and his students managed to establish the History of Religions as an independent field of study with a firm base in state universities. They all envisaged a scholarly tradition of the History of Religions in the Turkish language. Utilizing modern Western literature and methods, they wanted to create a Turkish pool of scholarship, independent from that of the West in terms of the subject matter and original contribution to scholarship. Taking the above-mentioned achievements into consideration, their dream seems to have come true to a large extent.

In order to create an independent legacy of the History of Religions in Turkish, the first major step was to study general topics of Judaism and Christianity, and to a lesser extent of other World religions. These Ph.D. studies were to create a foundation of scholarship in Turkish, upon which more specific subject matter was to be built. One can easily detect an idea of 'territorialism', where a cumulative approach leads scholars to create a literature of the History of Religions in Turkish for Turkish intellectuals and the public, which is increasingly independent of Western literature. As a result, several general, introductory studies in major World religions appeared, which prioritize informing the public and the Turkish scholarly community.<sup>[18]</sup>

Prof. Tanyu and his students considered that they need to train experts in certain major fields, primarily Judaism and Christianity, these experts would create trustworthy scholarship so that the Turkish intellectuals and scholars would depend on these national reliable foundational studies for satisfying their curiosity and utilize them for their researches. Subsequent works would depend on the previous ones, so that an 'indigenous and national' tradition and culture of the History of Religions would soon arise. The political and intellectual context of Prof. Tanyu and his immediate students would explain why they took a rather ambivalent attitude to Western scholarship. On the one hand, they utilize and depend on Western literature and methods on religion, while on the other they feel a certain distrust of Western scholarship. They must have followed the intellectual developments that focused on the relationship between Western scholarship on the Orient and colonialism, which eventually gave rise to critical studies of Edwards Said and the like.

### 3. Current Situation and General Overview

It was understandable to make wide-ranging, general studies on some major aspects of World religions in the fifties, sixties, and even seventies, for the History of Religions was still a quite young discipline in the World. Foundational studies were then very common and normal. Those studies served as a foundation for further studies; however, since their data are no longer valid, they are only useful as historical artifacts, with the exception of major works that we still need referring to.

[17] Adam, "Hikmet Tanyu'dan Günümüze Türkiye'de Dinler Tarihi", 510-511.

[18] This applies to the majority of the second and the third generation Historian of Religions. To give some examples: Ömer Faruk Harman, *Dinler Tarihi Açısından Şehristânî ve el-Milel ve'n-Nihal* (İstanbul: Marmara University, Institute of Social Sciences, PhD thesis, 1983). (*Shahristani and al-Milal wa'n-Nihal from the perspective of the History of Religions*); Günay Tümer, *Bîrûnî'ye Göre Dinler ve İslam Dini* (Ankara: Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı Yayınları, 1975) (*Biruni's view of religions and Islam*); M. Süreyya Şahin, *Fener Patrikhanesi ve Türkiye* (İstanbul: Ötüken Neşriyat, 1996) (*Patriarchate of Fener and Türkiye*); Kadir Albayrak, *Keldaniler ve Nesturiler* (Ankara: Vadi Yayınları, 1997) (*Chaldeans and Nestorians*).

Since Prof. Tanyu and his students in the sixties and seventies, there has been a habit of “creating a foundation to the studies of the History of Religions in Türkiye”, which motivates supervisors to give general PhD topics on any major and substantial aspect of World religions, which is still partly continuing today.<sup>[19]</sup> This is a highly useful and beneficial motivation, which gave rise to an immense variety of scholarly output that we mentioned above. However, one should also be reminded that to prioritize informing Turkish intellectuals on as many topics as possible results in very long, arduous theses that are inclined more to transfer what the critical Western scholarship actually produces on their respective topics. On the other hand, critical scholarship that is attuned to creating new information, approaches and methods seems to fall by the wayside. Therefore, what we have as output of so many theses is more like fine text-books on various topics which generally provide little or no critical contribution to their respective areas of research. A direct result of this would be more dependency on fine Western scholarship, rather than critical engagement with them. However, it would be quite unfair to overlook the substantial amount of exceptional, critical scholarship that represents good exceptions to this general condition.

As an insider of the scholarly community of the History of Religions in Türkiye, I believe that the major obstacle in achieving the goals of national History of Religions ideal—creating an original, unique scholarly tradition in Turkish—is the lack of appropriate tools for engaging critical scholarship, “the hermeneutic tool box”. I believe that on this critical point the Turkish Historians of Religion should come together to find solutions to this problem. In order to explicate our point, a few extra words are necessary.

In any fine historical critical study, the production of knowledge, in general terms, is made through a balanced relation between the source material and modern literature. For instance, if we are to study St Augustine’s biblical hermeneutics, any of his writings and other material from his age are the main source material; whereas any type of study on Augustine in modern times constitutes our literature. Two types of material, naturally, require two different types of engagement. Source material is our final reference point, where we gather correct and appropriate information. Literature, on the other hand, is where we need to engage critically; it might be a reference for us as long as their information checks with the sources. Otherwise a researcher is free to accept or reject the theses and information provided by literature, and this is where he or she would make his or her contribution to scholarship; i.e., this *critical engagement* is what a thesis is. In a Ph.D. level study, this kind of contribution is expected, even necessary.

The major shortcoming in the History of Religions theses in Türkiye, albeit a good amount of exceptions, is the inappropriate use of literature in lieu of source material; taking their information and approaches uncritically (or insufficiently critically) as if they are source material. These types of studies, take some fine critical scholarship as source material, organize them in a standard and repetitive format, and by only transferring the already existing data into the Turkish language, they unfortunately cannot contribute much to scholarship. This major fallacy can be detected by reading the introductions of the theses, where they review the contributions of the previous scholarship of their respective topics, as well as their bibliographies, where they generally do not feel the need to provide separate lists of the source material and literature. One might argue that putting all source material and literature in one list reveals the underlying supposition that these two are engaged in the same manner. These shortcomings are relevant to many of the theses reviewed.<sup>[20]</sup>

[19] Among the theses we reviewed the following are examples to this understanding: Kaymaz, *Hristiyan Teolojisinde Kutsal Ruh Tartışmaları (Kökeni, Mahiyeti ve Dogmatlaşma Süreci)* (Debates on the Holy Spirit in Christian theology (Origin, nature and the process of dogmatization)); Karataş, *Nichiren Budizmi* (Nichiren Buddhism); Abudukelimu, *Çin Kaynaklarına Göre Taoizm* (Taoism according to the Chinese sources).

[20] We prefer not to give specific examples for two reasons: first, this might turn into a too long review article; and second, this might offend some of the authors and theses supervisors.

In any proper critical thesis, the introduction aims to make a thorough critique of the current scholarship on the related topic, with a view to stating, in a most articulate manner, the scholarly contribution that the thesis is to make. Ideally this type of scholarly contribution is the rationale and justification of a PhD thesis; however, among Turkish historians of religion, appeals to “filling” a purported gap in Turkish-language scholarship frequently serve as the primary justification. In almost all of the theses that we reviewed, such rationales as “lack of any scholarly work in Türkiye” seems to legitimize their topics, while their reviews of the existing scholarship seem more like summaries of their scholarly contribution, rather than proper critical engagements. Many of the theses, however, do quite a good job in terms of providing their readers a thorough snapshots of the critical views on their subjects as well as excellent summaries of related issues. This being the case, what we get is fine textbooks on an increasing number of subjects related to World religions.

The first thing a PhD candidate, or his/her supervisor takes care of in choosing a topic for a thesis is to find such a “territory”, where no Turkish scholar has touched before. This practical habit reveals the same circular mentality, that is to lay scholarly foundations in Turkish on as wide topics as possible, providing the readers with as much data as possible, with little or no critical engagement and scholarly contribution. Scholars then become the only Turkish expert on a certain topic, which gives them a highly prestigious comfort zone. However, critical scholarship does not prefer too much quietness in terms of the topics studied. Researchers prefer areas of study where many scholars focus their attentions. These crowded and busy fields are generally fertile ground where new contributions are to be made, new sentences are to be uttered, and new approaches are to be articulated.

## Conclusion

Despite some quite exceptional original scholarship, the Turkish academic output in the field of the History of Religions generally prefers to focus on topics related to various aspects of world religions that have certain gravity and significance, upon which no previous studies in the Turkish language have been made as Ph.D. theses. These studies yields little good fruit in terms of critical contribution to scholarship, and end up being good summaries of existing data, repeating what is already known with the only difference of being written in the Turkish language. This is a circular approach, for one can find thousands of important topics to be treated in this manner.

The above-mentioned studies are naturally useful in many ways, for they provide the scholarly community and public a first-class data and scholarly perspectives in various important subjects. They certainly fill a vacuum of information in a quite healthy manner. However, this approach is the major obstacle that prevents the Turkish academia from realizing a sufficient critical engagement with scholarship to create alternative approaches and data to Western scholarship. The Turkish historians of religion should find ways to produce original and unique scholarship. The first step to take is, to our understanding, to leave this habit of finding untrodden paths, new territories as their field of study and to engage critically with current scholarship. It is then we may be able to begin to speak of “Turkish Historians of Religions” as a unique and original community of scholars, who have a significant contribution to universal scholarship.



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