Chapter 3
Memorabilia of Asia: Diez’s Albums Revisited

David J. Roxburgh

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“Food with salt and salt with moderation”
“Everyone dines, whatever he finds”
“Boys who flatter are not attractive”
“A pauper who does not have debts is a great man”

Maxims from the Oghuznāma

These proverbs, excerpted from several hundred of their kind, typify the diverse sources of knowledge relished by Heinrich Friedrich von Diez (1751–1817) (fig. 3.1). As an Orientalist, Diez embodied several traits common to scholars of the late-Enlightenment period: he wanted to challenge old ideas, displace stereotypes, and disrupt monolithic portrayals of cultures by seeking out new written sources and making them available in translations with commentaries. His initial focus was always local, internal, or context bound – Diez sought to project and preserve the subjective voice, agency, and “self-knowledge” (Selbsterkenntnis) of whichever author or source he was writing about. Yet his ultimate objectives were frequently universal, expressions of a desire to point out contacts and affinities between systems and structures of cultural belief. Unlike many of his forebears in Orientalist schol-

arship, Diez's observations also reflected firsthand experience gained through several years of residency in Constantinople, where he was exposed to an urbane and cosmopolitan society. He endlessly complained about misrepresentations of the Ottomans and "Orientals" and held that exposing their literary works – spanning multiple genres – to European readers was the key to securing "justice" (Gerechtigkeit) for them.2

2 He made this point directly in Denkwürdigkeiten von Asien in Künsten und Wissenschaften, Sitten, Gebräuchen und Alterthümern, Religion und Regierungsverfassung aus Handschriften und eigenen Erfahrungen gesammelt von Heinrich Friedrich von Diez...Zweyter Theil, Berlin 1815, p. 105. The passage reads: "Wenn also aus jenen

It is a pity that the breadth and depth of his Orientalist scholarship has not yet received the attention that it merits,