The present essay discusses questions related to the politics of language in the Ottoman empire in general, and the role of Persian and Turkish in that polity in particular, exemplified by the books in Bayezid II’s library, as listed in the inventory compiled by his librarian ʿAtufi. The first part of the essay focuses on books of Turkish/Turkic poetry, which is followed by a discussion of Turkish lexicography and a number of other genres in Turkish and Turkic. Poetry in Turkish/Turkic has its own section in the inventory, although, as will be demonstrated, it can also be found in other sections. The second part of the essay discusses Persian lexicography. Lexicographic works, whether in Turkish or Persian, are registered by the learned librarian in a section on lexicography in general, which naturally consists mainly of Arabic lexicography.

PART I: THE POLITICS OF TURKISH IN THE LANDS OF RUM BETWEEN THE MID-FOURTEENTH AND EARLY SIXTEENTH CENTURIES

In 1350, Hoca Mesʿud, a prominent Turkish poet wielding his pen at the court of the Aydınids in western Anatolia, expressed a great deal of vernacular anxiety when composing a maṣnavī, i.e., a narrative poem in couplets, in Turkish. Deeming the phonetic structure of this language unfit for the Arabo-Persian poetic metrical system, he recommended avoiding Turkish words in Turkish poetry as much as possible and using Persian and Arabic words instead:

Now please allow me to apologize:
Alas! The Turkish tongue is short breadthwise.

Should I compose verse but in Turkish pure,
it would be such that no tongue ever’d endure.

When masterfully mixed are tongue and speech,
Turkish’s like when the salt the soup doth reach.

You should but Arabic and Persian words write,
for when the Turkish tongue is versified,
sometimes it fits the pattern, sometimes not,
clumsily slipping meter, rhythmwise not.

Too many faults the verse has, too much change!
In poetry, Turkish becomes too strange.

It has no words th’original to follow.

Compose your verse just like your heart will allow!
Sing in this tongue; the rules are all transgression:
no meter, no long vowels, no gemination.

If half your verse is not in Arabic,
the other half’s in Persian and Turkic.

If you’ve the proper capability,
sieve out the mud, preserve but purity.1

By contrast, almost two and a half centuries later, sometime between 1592 and 1598/99, the brilliant and prolific litterateur, Mustafa ʿĀli (d. 1600), expressed vernacular triumph in a veritable language manifesto for Ottoman Turkish in the preface to his Kühnūl-ahbār (The Essence of History):

The astonishing language current in the state of Rum, composed of four languages [West Turkish, Chaghatay Turkic, Arabic, and Persian], is a pure gilded tongue, which, in the speech of the literati, seems more difficult than any of these.

If one were to equate speaking Arabic with a religious obligation (farz), and the use of Persian with a sanctioned tradition (sünnet), then the speaking of a Turkish made up of these sweethees becomes a meritorious act (miṣṭaḥabb), and, in the view of those eloquent in Turkish, the use of simple Turkish should be forbidden.2
The poet Hoca Mesʿud was looking to the centers of Islamic learning for Persian and Arabic models, and he found his own idiom clumsy in its capacity to catch up with them. While implicitly boasting that he still manages to pull off the feat of composing a narrative poem in Turkish despite the fact that he considers this idiom unwieldy in its adaptation of Arabo-Persian rules of poetry, his poem nonetheless displays his fascination with and submission to these two prestigious literary traditions. Hoca Mesʿud's patrons, the Aydınids, were presiding over a courtly culture that attempted to outdo other local courts in Anatolia by adopting Arabo-Persian cultural models as conveyed to them by the Seljuk and their overlords, the Ilkhanid Mongols, while simultaneously trying to reflect the ethos of these models to their Turkophone subjects. At the end of the sixteenth century, on the other hand, Mustafa ʿĀli was writing not as a court litterateur but as a self-conscious bureaucrat working in the full-fledged, proud literary tradition of Ottoman Turkish. Inasmuch as he conceptualizes the Ottoman Turkish language as a *summa* of Anatolian Turkish, Chaghatai Turkic, Arabic, and Persian, Mustafa ʿĀli expresses a political theology in which the Ottoman imperial enterprise is conceived as heir to the grand political, religious, and cultural traditions of high Islam on par with Persian and Arabic. ʿAtufi’s inventory provides very interesting insights on the transition between these two stages of the Turkish literary tradition.

This first part of the present essay is about the Turkish and Turkic books of poetry and lexicography in the library inventory (henceforth referred to simply as “the inventory”) of Bayezid II (r. 1481–1512), prepared by the palace librarian ʿAtufi. Straddling literary and cultural history, I address the symbolic and political functions of Turkish in the Ottoman imperial venture, from the second half of the fifteenth century through the early sixteenth century, i.e., during the respective reigns of Mehmed II (r. 1444–46, 1451–81) and Bayezid II. The paper takes as a premise that the inventory expresses the politics of the patronage of learning and of the literary arts during the respective reigns of the aforesaid rulers. While my focus is on poetry and lexicography, I will also touch on other genres inasmuch as they pertain to the discussion of literary language. Although the section of Turkish/Turkic poetry books in ʿAtufi’s inventory also includes historical narrative poetry, that subject is examined by other contributors to the present volume and is thus dealt with only cursorily here. In the first part, I give a general thematic and structural analysis of the distribution of Turkish/Turkic works in the inventory, followed by a discussion of issues involved in the identification of individual works, which are enumerated according to genre. In addition to the sections in ʿAtufi’s inventory that are dedicated to Turkish poetry and lexicography, I will also touch upon Turkish/Turkic works listed in other sections of the document, although they are discussed in greater detail by other contributors to the present volume.

The inventory contains approximately 200 titles in Turkish/Turkic. This may seem to be a small number compared to the more than 5,000 volumes in Arabic and Persian, the two prestige idioms in the Persianate Islamic world at the time. It is also disproportionately small if we compare it to the burgeoning Turkish literary output in the rest of the sixteenth century, which overshadowed the importance of Arabic and Persian after the 1590s in the Ottoman context. However, we should bear in mind that the Turkish literary tradition was much younger than the Persian and Arabic traditions. We should also compare the percentage of Turkish books in the library of Bayezid II to the number of vernacular-language works in contemporary Western royal libraries. Under the librarianship of the famous Bartolomeo Sacchi, known as “Platina,” the librarian of Pope Sixtus IV (1471–84), the Vatican Library expanded to include about 3,500 volumes. Around the same time, the Corvinian Library of King Matthias of Hungary (r. 1458–90), the largest collection in the Christian world outside the Vatican at the time, had around 2,500 volumes; and the libraries of Henry VIII of England housed approximately 1,000 volumes after the sequestration of the holdings of English monasteries. Each of these libraries contained books almost exclusively written in Greek and Latin, i.e., the cosmopolitan languages of culture in the West during the Renaissance: the number of works in vernacular languages was probably minimal in the case of the Vatican, zero in the case of the Corvinian Library, and also relatively small in that of Henry VIII.

East of the Ottoman empire, the situation was no different. The number of Turkish books in Bayezid II’s