THE RISE AND DEVELOPMENT OF WRITTEN TURKISH IN ANATOLIA

by

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It is known that, in Central Asia and in the neighbouring regions into which the Turkish language and literature extended, there is no definite break between written Turkish of the Pre-Islamic period and that of the period when it arose as a vehicle for Mohammedan thought. In these areas it is possible to follow the process by which Turkish literature assumed a Mohammedan form, and to establish the existence of the tradition of Uigur orthography in the manner, for example, of employing Arabic script.

In complete opposition to the system used in Anatolia and the neighbouring areas, which used the Arabic script, the Turkish orthography employed in Central Asia was under the influence of the Uigur system of writing. We see that vowels were written in Turkish words, and that for voiced and unvoiced consonants only ـ، ـ، for dark and light sound groups only ـ،، and for ـ، were used.

It is the general belief that the first Turks to enter Anatolia and the surrounding countries produced, with considerable effort, a new literature bearing the impress of Persian literature, and having no link whatsoever with the old. The prevalence of this belief is due to the influence of those literary historians who, basing themselves upon verse chronicles, regard the Turkish Anatolian literature as having begun in the 15th century. The better knowledge of this period which has resulted from F. Köprülî’s wide researches amongst the texts themselves has shown the old view to be inaccurate, and the beginnings of Turkish literature in Asia Minor are now placed as far back as the 13th century. Despite this, however, and the new knowledge which has accrued from researches carried out in national libraries, the old view has prevailed because of

1 See Köprülîzade M. Fuad, Türk edebiyatı tarahi, İstanbul 1926, pp. 281-322.
the general confusion of our knowledge on this subject. Added to this is the recognition that this area constituted an important centre of Islamic culture, on account of the Persian and Arabic works that are proved to have been written in various parts of Anatolia between the 12th and 14th centuries. Further, several writers in Asia Minor at the same period, who used Turkish, complained of the insufficiency of this language as a medium.

Those writers who, in works that give the impression of being the first experiments in written Turkish in Anatolia, either say that they do not know Turkish, or complain of the Turkish language, may be arranged in the following order:

Jalâladdin Rûmî (13th century):

... man agar Turk nistam — dânam man in qadar, ki baturkist ab su ‘although I am not a Turk, I know that ab in Turkish means water’ (no. VII, see n. 1, p. 253).

Sultân Valad (13th century):

Türk dilin biliirmiseydim ben — söy le belli göstereydim ben ‘If I had known Turkish, I would have made it clear with words’ (İbâtânâma, 78th Turkish couplet, see n. 2, p. 253).

Türkçe bilyediyim aydaydum ben size — svarlars, kim Teârîdendegî bize ‘If I had known Turkish, I would have revealed the secrets that came to us from God’ (Rabûânâma, 97th Turkish couplet, see n. 3, p. 253).

If I had known Turkish, I would have made one word into a thousand’ (Divân 14 : 8, see 4, p. 253).

Güdär az guft-i turki u az ruyni — fun az an iştîlâh mahrûmi ‘Since you are deprived of those expressions, abandon speaking in Turkish and Greek’ (İbâtânâma 75).

Just as in the 14th century 4‘Asîq Paşa, in his Garîbânâma, was to declare that the intellectuals of his time had no respect for Turkish, so Hâvâja Mas‘ûd spoke of the difficulties he encountered in writing his poem Suhayl u Navbâhûr on account of the Turkish language, and complained, in his translation of Bûstân, of the insufficiency of Turkish as compared with Persian. In the 15th century Sinân Paşa begged to be excused for having written his Tazarrû‘ât in Turkish, whilst Sanja Kemal confessed that he was ashamed of having composed his Salâtînâma in such a crude language. Finally, in the 16th century we find Fuzûlî recognising the insufficiency of the Turkish language 4.

It follows from what has been explained just above that because of the distance separating Anatolia and the neighbouring areas from the centres of the old Turkish literature and because of their proximity to the centres of Islamic culture in Arabia and Persia, the incoming Turks, who had a very low level of civilization and had lost the traditions of the old literary language, were introduced to Islamic civilization through the medium of their neighbours’ languages. It is also probable


4 For further information see Köprüliçezâde M. Fuad, Mitât edebiyyat cercayânının ilk mübeşzlileri ve Diyon-i Türkî-i başîl, İstanbul 1928, pp. 11-15.