

## **FIRST DIALECTOLOGISTS**



**MAHMUD BIN HUSEYIN BIN MUHAMMED AL KASHGARI**  
**(apx. 1008-1090)**

“For long years, I have wandered the towns and lands of Turks, Turkmen, Oghuzes, Chigils, Yaghmas and Kirghiz, collecting their words, learning and scraping to my mind the various features of these words. I did this work not because of lack of my language knowledge, quite contrary, I did it to show all the things and differences between Turkic dialects” (Esker (2008: 55).

## 1. The manuscript

It was a day filled with glamour and menace contrasting each other in İstanbul. The first year of First World War. Ottoman Empire was snuggled in many fronts. Despite the hard time, Ali Emiri, a retired civil officer, known for his love of manuscripts and books were still in the trace of new pieces to add on his collection. He visited Burhan's antiquarian bookseller. He had heard about an old and enigmatic manuscript which was written in Arabic. Burhan told Ali Emiri that, this manuscript was handed to him by an old woman, and it was nothing more than just a trivial artifact. But when Ali Emiri examined the manuscript carefully a strange feeling of joy entered his body. The book regarded as a trivial artifact was the most magnificent work that was written on Turkic languages. Ali Emiri could die from happiness but he tried not to show his feeling. Ali Emiri bought this priceless manuscript for just 33 liras. The manuscript in question was *Dīwān Lughāt al-Turk* (Compendium of Turkic Dialects) by Mahmud Kashgari. This is the first dictionary of Turkic languages. This work is not only just a lexicon, but it is also a general observer of Turkic tribes.

The first one who mentioned about this work was Bedreddin Mahmud, mostly known under the name Aynî Antepi. He benefited from Mahmud Kasgharî's work in the first volume of his book *Ikdü-l-Cuman fî Tarih-i Ehli'z Zaman*. Aynî used some material from this work also in the *Tarikh-ul-Shihabi*, which he wrote with his brother. Then, Katib Chelebi, too, mentioned the *Compendium* in his work *Keshf-ul-Zünûn*. However, until 1914, there wasn't any solid proof of the existence of the *Compendium*. The manuscript passed a long voyage through the history and geography until it found its place to the dusty bookshelves of an antique shop in İstanbul.

The discovery of Ali Emiri caused a lot of changes in the development of Turkology. As S. Frederick Starr (2013: 315) stated, it is "a ground-breaking text... and a pioneering work of cultural anthropology". Ali Emiri told about the value of the manuscript to his friends with the following words:

This is not only a book; it is the whole Turkestan and even not only Turkestan, but the whole world. Turkness and the language of Turks will gain

another brightness thanks to this book. This is the Turkic equivalent of the Sibawavh's book. There is no this kind of book on Turkic languages. Even the whole universe will not be sufficient for the true value of this book. There's a similarity between this book and Joseph. He was sold for only a few amount of coins, however, later in Egypt, his value was measured in jewels which is equal to his weight. Now Burhan asked for this book only thirty three liras, yet, I won't sell the book for folds of jewels and emeralds.

Under the protection of the Ottoman Prime Minister Talat Pasha, the work published by the well known scholar Rifat Kilisli between the years of 1915-1917. Later, this brilliant piece of Turkic culture translated into Modern Turkish by Besim Atalay (1939-1943), into Uzbek by Salih Mutallibov (1960-1963), into Modern Uigur by a group of researchers (Abbas *et al.* 1981-1984), into English by Robert Dankoff and James Kelly (1982-1985), into Kazakh by Esker Equeubay (1997-1998), into Persian by Hüseyin Düzgün (2004), into Azerbaijani by Ramiz Esker (2006), into Russian by Alibey Rustamov (2010), and into other languages.

The manuscript is a unicum, but unfortunately, it is not the author's original. It was copied by Muhammad ibn Abubekr after two hundred years from the death of Mahmud Kashgarî. The manuscript is preserved in the National Library (*Millet Kütüphanesi*) in the Fatih quarter in İstanbul.

## 2. Biography

*Dīwān Lughāt al-Turk* has been written by Mahmud Kashgari. This man is the first dialectologist, the first lexicographer, and generally the first known linguist of Turkic languages. Besides, we can regard him also as a folklorist, an ethnographer and a philosopher. It is important to note also that he used a comparative method in linguistics seven centuries before than Rasmus Rask, Franz Bopp and Jacob Grimm.

The full name of Mahmud Kashgari is Mahmud bin Huseyin bin Muhammed al Kashgari. There is not enough data about his life: Our whole information in this regard

consists of some information given in his book and some related passages from various works. So, we cannot show year by year his biographical data. It is known that he was born approximately in 1008 in the village Opal near Kashgar (Esker 2008: 6). According to the Arabic historian Ibn al-Athir, he belonged to a noble family, a monarch lineage from the Karakhanid dynasty who reigned in Central Asia. Mahmud Kashgari had received a good education at *medreses*, where he learned mathematics, philosophy and other fields as well as Arabic and Persian.

Mahmud Kashgari dedicated his life to the examination of Turkic languages and culture. He tried to bring cultural pieces of Turkish tribes together.

Mahmud's life as a wanderer begins with a coup. The ruler of Karahanid Khanate Yaghan Tekin decided to left the throne to his son, Muhammed bin Huseyn, the father of Mahmud. However, during the handover ceremony, the youngest wife of Yaghan Tekin poisoned other princes, including Muhammed bin Huseyn, to appoint his own son Ibrahim to the throne. After that, Mahmud Kashgari had fled for his life and to avoid the attention of soldiers of Ibrahim Khan, he introduced himself usually as a wanderer or scholar (Almas 1988: 333-335).

Mahmud Kashgari travelled among Turks, "through their cities and their steppes, learning their dialects and their verses" (Esker 2008: 55). Eventually, starting from the western shores of Caspian Sea, Mahmud Kashgari reached the lake of Lobnor and from the river basin of Ili to the Kashkaria's southern borders. He completely learned this area, identified the borders and monuments of Turkic people.

Kashgari had worked on the *Compendium of Turkic Dialects* for nearly 15 years. While Seljuks were penetrating Byzantine forces at the Manzikert, Mahmud Kashgari were probably preparing for finishing his work in Baghdad. He completed it during 1075-1077 in this city. This was a period of rattling pace for the advance of Turks to the West with great successes and an era when Turkic dynasties became politically dominant in the Islamic world. As Turkic advance was fierce and hegemony on the Muslim world established, Kashgari appointed a duty to himself for show Arabs how Turkic language is rich and perfect. After finishing his work, Mahmud Kashgari presented it to the caliph of Baghdad. "Since it is dedicated to the caliph al-Muqtadi

(1075-1094), its purpose was perhaps to explain to the Abbasid court the language and customs of their Seljuk overlords” (Dankoff 1975: 68).

Mahmud Kashgari returned to his home city Kashgar from Baghdad approximately in 1080. It is assumed that he settled in the village Opal, near to Kashgar, and built a school (*Mahmudiyye Medrese*), where he lectured for ten years. Mahmud Kashgari died here in 1090.

### 3. *Dīwān Lughāt al-Turk*

Mahmud Kashgari’s work consisted of an introduction and eight chapters. In the introduction, the author states that his aim is to describe the dialects of Turks, because people must learn Turkic languages to understand “this race chosen by Allah”.

The chapters are designed according the traditions of Arabic lexicography. The first chapter deals with the words that begin with a vowel. The second chapter describes the words that do not contain the letters ‘alif, waaw, yaa’. The third chapter contains the words that have a double consonant in the writing. The fifth chapter presents the words that begin with the consonant *y*. The topic of the sixth and seventh chapters are three and four letters words, correspondingly. The eighth chapter focuses on the words that contain a velar nasal or a nasal consonant cluster (*nc*). The meanings of the all headwords are given in Arabic. In addition to definitions, Kashgari gave also example sentences or phrases (like proverbs, verses, passages from the folk literature) for many entries.

*Compendium* cannot be considered just a simple Turkic-Arabic dictionary; it is also a general Turkic encyclopedia, as it contains many information about Turkic ethnography, culture, folklore, etc. Kashgari examined the Turkic tribes one by one and systematically. For example, he gave the following information about Oghuz tribe, to which Turkish, Azerbaijani and Turkmen people belong: “They are divided into twenty two divisions; every division has a special document and symbol (*tamga*), stamped using hot irons on domesticated animals. They recognize each other by these symbols. The first division and the leader of all them is Kinik tribe. Kiniks are the rulers of our

time... The mentioned divisions are the roots and several clans branched from these roots. I didn't mention them to cut short. The names of these divisions originate from their founding fathers".

In the book, there are also valuable descriptions of the grammar of Turkic languages and dialects. Kashgari divided them into two groups: "pure" and "mixed". "The purest and most accurate language is the language of those who know just one language, who do not mix with Persians and who do not customarily visit other lands. The language of those who know two languages and are in close contacts with townsmen is corrupted. The bilingual tribes are Soghdak, Kenchek and Argu... The language of Chomul clan, a nomadic people are different, but they know Turkic very well. The tribes Kay, Yabaku, Tatar and Basmil are the same. Even though every tribe has its own dialect, they speak Turkic very well. The only Turkic-speaking tribes are Kirghiz, Kipchak, Oghuz, Tukhsi, Yaghma, Chighil, Charuk and Ughrak. The languages of Yemeks and Bashqurts are similar to theirs... The shortest one is the language of Oghuzes, the most accurate one is the language of Tukhsis and Yaghmas".

Kashgari examined the dialects by the means of lexicon, morphology and phonetics. The differences between the dialects are also given, like this: "Yagmas, Tukhsis, Kipchaks, Yabakus, Tatars, Kays, Chomuls and Oghuzes always turn *d* into *y* and they never articulate *ð*. They call the beech tree *kayıŋ*, whereas others call it *kaðıŋ*".

Many linguistic and extra-linguistic details were given by Kashgari. For instance, information about the alphabet that used by Uyghur's craved on epitaphs, which was only understood by them and Chinese.

There is also an interesting world map in the book. In the center of the map, we see Balasagun, which was once a trade capital. Kashgari spent a period of his life there. The ruins of this city are near Bishkek, capital of Kyrgyzstan. The map is in the form of a circle. The north, south, east and west directions are indicated. The points at the end of the West direction, where according to Kashgari, Kipchaks and *Frenks* live, reach Volga river. The southwest border of the map reaches Ethiopia and the south border reaches India. There are China and Japan at the east border of the map. The map is remarkable for some reasons. Firstly, it shows the regions inhabited by Turks and their

distribution. Secondly, we can learn old Turkic names of lands, rivers and seas. Thirdly, it is the first map of Japan, even though it is more like a draft.

Finally, it should be mentioned that beside the *Compendium*, there was also another work of Mahmud Kashgari, *Kitabu Javahiru'n-Nehv fi Lughati't-Turk*, which is a work on Turkic syntax, but it is still missing. By the way, the Euroasian Association Writers in Ankara, established a great prize, a big amount of gold, for the one who will find the manuscript of this work.

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