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ENGLISH WRITERS ON THE TURKISH
LANGUAGE, 1670 - 1832

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The first Englishman to write a Turkish grammar, albeit in Latin, was William Seaman. Born in 1606 (the *Dictionary of National Biography* does not say where), he matriculated at Balliol College, Oxford, in 1623-4, graduating Bachelor of Arts at the same time, and became a Master of Arts in 1626. Two years later he obtained the living of Upton Scudamore in Wiltshire. He was rector of it until his death on 7 November 1680, and there he was buried. His parishioners were doubtless happy to have him back at last. Shortly after his appointment, he travelled to Istanbul in the service of Sir Peter Wych, who was British Ambassador there from 1628 to 1639.

In 1652, Seaman published *The reign of sultan Orchan second king of the Turks*, a translation from Sa'deddin. He dedicated it to Lady Jane Merick, formerly Sir Peter's wife, giving as one of his reasons for doing so, 'because (during my youth) I began the study of the Turkish language while I was a servant of your family.' We may conjecture that he served them as chaplain and as tutor to their children.

In 1650 he began a Turkish translation of the New Testament, in fully pointed Arabic script, which was published at Oxford in 1666. There is a small mystery here. The entry in the Bodleian catalogue runs: 'Testamentum novum. Turcice redditum. Opera Gu. Seaman. [In the Nogai dialect]...' But Nogai it is not, as two specimen sentences will show. 'In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God' comes out as: *bidāyette idi sakhun* [sic for *sukhan*] *ve sakhun Allāhta idi ve*

Allāh idi. 'All things were made by Him': *mecmū'lar anuη ile [yākhūd anuη elinde] mevcūd oldilar*. A possible explanation is that the catalogue entry may have been the work of Thomas Hyde, Bodley's Librarian from 1665 to 1701, or of someone equally learned and cantankerous, who chose this way of registering his contempt for Seaman's dog-Ottoman.

Seaman's *Grammatica Linguae Turcicae* was published by the Oxford University Press in 1670. Here, from his Preface, is his account of why he wrote it :

It is known to all how troublesome to all neighbouring nations and rightly feared by them has been the power of the Turks from many years back, nor can it be doubted that it would strike terror into other nations further removed if they were to win dominion over the Mediterranean Sea, which they largely surround. To which, now that the island of Crete has been lately [1669] subjugated, the road is open excessively wide... Not yet, however, are we sufficiently well acquainted with their affairs... because their language... has hitherto remained unknown to Christians and neglected. Impelled by these considerations and principally by this concern,... that the Christian faith and the truth of the Gospel be communicated to them in their vernacular tongue... I have completed this Grammar and committed it to type... What the Turkish language is like, this Grammar shows...

Although the text is in Latin, with the Turkish in Arabic characters, the book is paginated back to front and right to left, as if it were wholly in Arabic characters. Seaman is not very good on phonetics. He does note the unvoicing of *d* after an unvoiced consonant, for example he remarks that *haqīqatde* is pronounced Hakikatte and he notes too the voicing of *t* before a vowel, as in *giderem* or *giderin* from *gitmek*. But he lists only five vowels : *e/a*, *i*, *o/u*, that is, the three vowels marked in Arabic writing, with alternative pronunciations for *fatha* and *damma*. He transcribes the word for 'your sons' as *Ogullerungnuz* and for 'our fathers' as *Babalerumüz*. He is aware of the existence of vowel

harmony insofar as it is marked by suffixes whose final letter may be *qāf* or *kāf*. So when speaking of the aorist negative: 'Verbs which make their infinitive in *mek* have these marks of negation: Mem, Mezem, Mez and Me. Those making it in *maq* are recognized by these marks of negation: Mam, Mazem, Maz, Ma.'

Except in the first section, where he describes the sounds, he rarely indicates the pronunciation of the words he cites. I shall therefore beg no questions but shall employ an unrefined transliteration, in italic, of the words he gives in Arabic script. Turkish words in roman type are as he transliterates them.

It is clear that he was primarily concerned with the written language. His examples, as he says in his Preface, are taken from the best authors. One might hazard a guess that he was a shy man. It is not surprising that on the few occasions when he offers some simple conversational sentences they do not carry conviction. As an example of the use of *ile*, he offers *anluru ile oturma*, 'Do not sit with them,' although he adds 'also read as *anlar ile*.'

Some of the questionable information he supplies may be put down to oversight. Having said that adjectives cannot be used without a noun, he later states that adjectives whose nouns are not expressed are declined like nouns. But often his mistakes are due to a lack of familiarity with the spoken language. He observes that nouns ending in vowels, or, as he puts it, in *elif*, *wāw*, *he*, and *yā* make their genitive in *ni* or *nu*. While recognizing that final *wāw* or *he* may be consonants, he says, 'I have seen, though rarely, words ending in *yā* without the characteristic *n* in the genitive as in *nehiyu qā'idesi budur*, «the rule of negation is this». Had he thought of asking a Turk to read the words to him, he would have realized that 'negation' was *nehy* not *nehī*, so that there was no need to postulate an exception to the rule.

He lists the cases of the noun as six in number, including the vocative - *Ya ata* 'O father!' - but not the locative. He mentions the suffix *de*, not as a case ending but as a preposition. 'It must be noticed that the prepositions (if it be permissible so to call them) are placed not before but after their cases, though some are suffixed to them and others are separate'. He gives the 'prepositions which

are affixed to the stem of the word' as *de*, *den*, *siz* or *suz*, and *ce*. He says *de* means 'in, at, by, concerning,' though the last meaning is not justified by his example '*ilm-i felek beyaninde*, 'concerning the science of astronomy.' It is hard to see why he does not call the locative a case, a concept surely familiar to him from Latin, and why he lists *den* as both case-ending and 'preposition'.

He gives the comparative in *rek/rak*, which was in full use in his century, and he notes that *eyurek* is rarer than *yek* and *yekrek*.

For the suffixed pronoun of the third person he gives only *i* and *leri*, as in 'Anung kilichi, his sword' and 'Anung kilichleri, his swords', not mentioning the post-vocalic *si*, although it occurs in some of his later examples.

His treatment of the verb is full but not totally reliable, as when he spoils his long account of the causative by including '*sevildurmek*, to make to be loved.' He sets out what he calls the potential mood but is in fact the impotential: *olimam*, *olimazsen*, *olimaz*, *olimazuz*, *olimazsiz*, *olimazlar*. He mentions the positive only in passing: 'From *itmek* to do and *bilmek* to know is made *idebilmek* to know how to do'. He includes among the parts of 'the defective verb substantive *im*, I am' a form '*icak* or *yicak*, when I am,' citing as an example '*koca yicak*, when he is old.' It may be that he arrived at this by having read *kocayıcak* somewhere and making a false division of it.

I would sum up Seaman's work as gallant but disappointing. Obvious errors aside, it is not systematic enough to command credence. And unfortunately it was the principal source used by the writer of the first Turkish grammar in English, Thomas Vaughan, Late of *Smyrna*, Merchant.

Vaughan's *A Grammar of the Turkish Language* came out in London in 1709. He never made the *Dictionary of National Biography*, though one could no doubt learn something of his career from the records of the Levant Company.

His *Preface* begins like this :

When first I resolved to publish this Grammar, I had no other View, then the Satisfaction and Advantage, which I supposed several Merchants abroad, and all who shall be design'd for *Turky*, might reap from such a Work.

But I had scarcely enter'd upon it, before I... conceiv'd it might be of good Use, and of Service to the Common Weal of Letters, to deliver some Thoughts how Languages in general may be easiest and best attain'd, and *Latin* in particular best taught.

He pursues this theme for eleven pages before coming on to Turkish :

This Grammar will admit of great Improvements, but being in *English*, and the *Turkish* put into a known Character,... I hope it will... prove an easier Introduction to the British Learner of that Tongue, than any yet extant. And though it's acknowledg'd to fall short of Meninsky's in Latin, i think I may venture to say, it's an improvement of Mr. Seaman's, which gave this its Form, and well-nigh all the Substance too. But there is some variation in the Grammar it self; and the Dialogues, Proverbs and Words, are a Collection from other Books, and my own Observations.

He is clearly more talkative than Seaman and has a better idea of pronunciation. He sets out the Arabic letters, but he relies throughout on transcription. Transcription, not transliteration; for example :

whereas in their proper Character the following Words are writ *Cosk* and *Gun*, I have interposed *y*, as *Cyosk* and *Gyun*; where this Difference is to be noted, that the *y* so following *C* and *G*, and coming before *o* and *u*, is to be deemed a Consonant.

It is curious, incidentally, how non-Turks seem to have heard the *ş* of *köşk* as *s*, whence the Italian *chiosco* and the French

kiosque. In what follows, Turkish words cited from Vaughan are shown exactly as he spells them.

Although his notion of pronunciation was better than Seaman's, he cannot escape criticism; he is sometimes very careless about transcribing his predecessor's examples. For 'unbeliever,' Seaman gives *inanmayici*, correctly spelled and pointed. Vaughan, through ignoring the vowel-points, gives *Inanmagy*. He transcribes Seaman's *yardum* as *yerdum*, *yakmak* as *yocmec*, *karşu* as *korshu*, *hakk* as *hoc*. He follows Seaman in some of his errors, such as giving a causative form of the passive, *sevildurmec*, and adds some of his own, such as supplying *sevmeç* with a genitive, *sevmeçhing*. While Seaman makes only a passing reference to the potential, Vaughan omits it entirely. On the other hand, there are some real advances over Seaman, for example :

Possessives of the Third Person are formed by adding *y* to Nouns that end in a Consonant, and *sy* to those that end in a Vowel, in the Singular Number; and in the Plural to both alike *lery*; as, ... *Baba*, a Father; *Babasy*, his Father; *Babalery*, his Fathers, or their Fathers; which is also expressed thus, *onlerung Babalery*.

He follows Seaman in not calling the locative a case, but he avoids the term 'preposition' when speaking of Turkish, preferring 'the *Turkish* Words, whereby the Prepositions of other Languages are expressed'. While including under this heading the suffixes *de* and *den*, he says of the latter, 'tho this seems rather the Termination of the Ablative Case of Nouns.' He simplifies the section on the verb quite a bit :

I pass by what Mr *Seaman* calls the second Preterimperfect Tense... as, *Sever-imishim*, I did love, &c. And his Preterpluperfect Tense... as, *Sevmish-idum*, I had loved, &c. And also the three other Preterpluperfect Tenses.. as, *Sevmish imish-im*; *Sevmisholdum*, and *Sevdumidy*; as well for that I have not observed them much in use, as for that the first Words being mentioned, the other Persons are easily formed by the foregoing Rules.

There is a further indication of his good sense in his chapter on Conjunctions, which he begins by saying that he is not going to use the 'hard Words, Disjunctive, Discretive, Illative, Adversative, Expletive, &c.'

Now tho' he places those Words never so properly, he is nothing of a Scholar to be sure, and shall hardly be deem'd a Man of common Sense, unless he has it at his Fingers Ends, that [*and*] is a Conjunction Copulative; [*or*] a Disjunctive; and [*unless*] Exceptive. With such insignificant Trumpery are Languages loaded; and the Learners hindered in their Progress: Not to say that the more noble Parts of Learning lie so deep under such Rubbish, that many a good Genius is worn out in removing it. But not to provoke the Traders in the Mysteries of Language and Sciences too far, return we to the Matter in hand.

He has very little on syntax and omits most of Seaman's literary examples, though he provides a facsimile text of what he calls a 'Temizuk,' that is, a *temessük* or Bill of Exchange, together with a transcription and a word-by-word analysis and translation. He adds, however, a Vocabulary and Dialogues.

The Vocabulary is of some interest. There are one or two funny mistakes, notably 'Hazifizzy, *one who gets the whole Alcoran by heart*' and 'Tuz, *Dust, or Salt*.' He has a pleasing definition of Khan: '*a Prince, also a great Square built round, (somewhat like the Royal-Exchange).*' There are one or two puzzles, for example 'Ya-yry, *light (in Weight).*' 'Ya-yry' must be a misprint for 'Ya-yny,' which is how he would probably have spelled *yeyni*. More baffling is 'hupé,' which occurs in the Dialogues in the sense of 'chilly'.

Vaughan's Dialogues are the most attractive feature of his book. Here is part of the first, in which the unfortunate merchant is trying to write a letter and getting no help at all from his servant:

Otaghy gyun iky akchelik murekéb aldim idy; nigé oldy? *The other Day I bought two Aspers worth of Ink; what's become of it?*

Ne ésil otaghý gun? iky ay ghedgdy, belky dahý ziyidé. *What other Day? 'Twas two Months ago, and perhaps longer.*

Var imdy dugandan bir akchelík al. *Go then, buy an Asper's Worth at the Shop.*

Vir imdy akché. *Give me Money then.*

Yaningdé bir akché bulunmázmy? *Have you not an Asper about you?*

Kalmadý. *No; (or none remains).*

Benimdé ufak akché yókdur. *I have no small Money.*

Var viresý al, sungré virúruz; yoksé bizé inanmázmy dersin bir akchelík murekebé? *Go take it upon tick, we'll pay hereafter; or do you say he will not trust us for an Asper's Worth of Ink?*

Inanúr, emmá aïepdur. *He'll trust, but it's a Shame.*

Var, chók suiléme. *Go, don't prate so much.*

It will be noticed that he shows the accentuation, though not always accurately. The Dialogues might have enabled a highly motivated student to learn to prate a bit. The trouble is the scarcely bridgeable gap between Vaughan's inadequate explanations and these cheerful and useful sentences.

Our third writer is Arthur Lumley Davids; not 'David,' as Harold Bowen calls him¹ nor yet 'Sir Davids Lumley,' as Ziya Gökalp calls him². *A Grammar of the Turkish Language* includes 'a Preliminary Discourse on the Language and Literature of the Turkish Nations, a Copious Vocabulary, Dialogues, a Collection of Extracts in Prose and Verse, and Lithographed Specimens of Various Ancient and Modern Manuscripts.' It was published in London in 1832 and dedicated to Sultan Mahmud, 'by whose genius and talents the Ottoman Empire has been regenerated, and by whose institutions it has been raised to a distinguished rank among the kingdoms of Europe and Asia.'

¹ Harold Bowen, *British Contributions to Turkish Studies*, (London/New York/Toronto, 1945), p. 43.

² Ziya Gökalp, *Türkçülüğün Esasları* (Ankara, 1920), p. 2.

It is not an easy work to review. It is probably fair to say that, though as a grammar it is feeble, it is an attractive and readable book. The anonymous contemporary reviewer in the *Asiatic Journal* (see note 5) observes, 'We have never seen a more creditable specimen of the typographical art.' The author was far ahead of his time in being devoted to the study of things Turkish and in deploring the way in which the virtues and achievements of the Turks were belittled by Europeans whose ignorance of them was almost total.

Of all the people who have issued from Central Asia, the Turks are perhaps the most interesting... While the accomplished Osmanlis are making rapid strides towards rivalling the most learned and polished of the European States, their wandering brethren in the farthest North, whose language is the only proof of their relationship, are plunged in the depths of primitive ignorance and barbarism; and these form the two extremities of that extended chain of society and civilization, of which the connecting links are regularly formed by the various intermediate nations of Turkish origin.

The Preliminary Discourse, from which these words are taken, is eighty-eight pages long, varied and interesting. It gives an outline of Turkish origins and history, Uygur, Chaghatai and Ottoman literature and Ottoman science. Near the end he says :

An immense sea of literature remains unnavigated : pearls and gems abound in its depths : and in offering my frail bark to guide the adventurous Student, whose thirst after knowledge may prompt him to explore the hidden treasures of Turkish literature - the Diplomatist, whose duty to his country, the Traveller, whose curiosity, or the Merchant whom the demands of commerce may lead to require the assistance of the language - I flatter myself, though imperfections may be visible to the critic's eye, that it will nevertheless enable them to attain the knowledge they require, and the objects which they seek.

Whether his self-confidence was justified is a question to which we shall presently address ourselves. As to the Preliminary Discourse, David Urquhart is unequivocal in his praise. He observes that at the time of its publication.

One unqualified voice of reprobation pervaded the whole of the Western nations; and not a doubt... remained of the practical extinction of the Ottoman empire, which, indeed, alone could have justified the opinions of the public, or the policy of the cabinets. At that moment, the publication of the essay of Mr. David [*sic*] derives no less merit from the boldness of the act, than from the intrinsic merits of the work... Appearing, as it has done, as an introduction to a bad and faulty grammar of a language which no one in England thinks worth studying, though spoken along sixty degrees of longitude and sometimes ten of latitude, of the most important regions on the face of the earth, and some of them in our own possession, it has excited but little attention, and been but little read... [Davids] lived long enough to witness the commencement of the mutual renunciation of antipathy, which must precede that fusion of the genius of the East and the West, which he so confidently predicted³.

At the end of the book, Davids prints some texts in Uygur, Chaghatai, Kipchak and Ottoman, together with his versions, which are not without merit. His translation of a passage from Naima is much better than Fraser's part-translation from the same historian, published in the same year⁴.

The most remarkable fact about Davids' book is that he began writing it in his sixteenth year and published it in his twenty-first. He died of cholera on 19 July of that same year, 1832⁵.

³ David Urquhart, *The Spirit of the East* (London, 1838), II, 285.

⁴ Charles Fraser, *Annals of the Turkish Empire, 1000-70; 1591-1659* (London, 1832).

⁵ For some details of his life, see *The Jewish Encyclopedia* (New York/London, 1903), IV, 471, and Henry Samuel Morais, *Eminent Israelites of the Nineteenth Century* (Philadelphia, 1880), pp. 42-4. The closing words of the

But pity at this tragedy should not keep us from examining his claim that his book would enable those who wanted to learn Turkish to attain the knowledge they required.

It must be said straight away that he does not mention vowel harmony. Bowen comments on his failure 'to explain that most striking characteristic of Turkish, the vowel harmonies, or even to notice the existence of the vowels ö, ü, and ı,' and suggests that the reason 'is no doubt that all these writers had learned to read Turkish in the Arabic characters, by which this feature of the language was not, and scarcely could be, distinguished'⁶. Thomas Vaughan cannot be excused so easily, because in his *Grammar* he represents himself as a gregarious sort of person who believed in communicating with the natives. And I am bound to say that Meninski, whose *Grammatica Turcica* was first published in Vienna in 1680, knew all about the eight vowels and vowel harmony. Maybe it was because he was a foreigner, to whom un-English sounds came more naturally than they did to Englishmen brought up on a solid diet of Latin, which they were taught to pronounce as if it were English.

It is true that Davids sometimes uses the letter *ü*, but it is hard to see on what principle. *Bu* ('this') he spells as *bu*, but *koku* ('scent') as *kökü*, and the word for 'hundred' as *yoç*. And when one sees him give the plural of *at* as *atler* and of *baba* as *babaler* and, incidentally, the Arabic plural of *sherif* as *sharfa*, one realizes that this was not yet the grammar which the English-speaking world had been waiting for.

Among the cases of the noun he includes the vocative *-ya at* 'o horse' - and ablative, but not the locative; he mentions *deh* and *den* later on as Indeclinable Postpositions governing the Nominative, although he has already shown *den* as the suffix of the ablative. He deserves credit for using the term 'postposition'; indeed, his use of it antedates the earliest citation (1846) in *OED*.

article in the latter work are : 'Short, but brilliant was the career which closed on the 19th of July, 1832, - a model that every youth should strive to copy.' See also *Asiatic Journal*, New Series IX, 353-6 (December 1832), for a warm, unsigned review of his book.

6. Harold Bowen, *op. cit.*, pp. 43-4.

When speaking of adjectives, he says, 'The word *nehkeh* or *nekeh* [i.e. *neki*] answers to our *than*, after a Comparative; as, *Osman zengindir neki ben*; 'Othman is richer than I.' I do not think he could have found this in any of his classical texts; perhaps it came from some informant whose Turkish was substandard. Even so, one would have expected it to mean 'as rich as' rather than 'richer than.' In fact, as one reads on, one starts to wonder whether he had ever heard proper Turkish spoken, except that having said that the comparative is formed by prefixing *dakhi*, as in *dakhi biuk*, 'greater,' he notes, 'It may not be improper to observe, that, in some parts of Turkey, this is pronounced as if written *daha*.' This curiously apologetic insertion of the plain truth suggests that he might have been unwilling to hurt the feelings of the postulated informant, whose testimony at this point at least he felt to be unreliable. For 'self,' *kendi*, he gives *gendu*, which he can scarcely have heard from a speaker of standard Turkish; this applies to many of the forms he cites, such as *sudurilmek*, which he gives for *sevdirilmek*. This last he calls the Causal Passive, and says there is also a Passive Causal, *suıldurmek*. Having seen the same in Seaman and Vaughan too, at this point I began to doubt myself.

He shows little grasp of the verb; thus he says of *imiş* that it means 'was,' and is also frequently used in the sense of the Present Tense.' He calls *idum* the Suppositive Mood of the Present Tense and says it means 'I should or would be.'

His short chapter on syntax is equally disappointing, with little useful information in it except lists of verbs usually governing the dative and ablative cases. For those essential elements of the language, the personal participles *olduğu* and *olacağı*, it seems that nothing has been learned, and much forgotten, since Seaman's time. Now we know from Davids' translations that he understood their function perfectly well. But all he says - and he gives not one single example - is: 'The Declinable Participles are subject to Number and Case, in the same manner as Nouns. They also take the Possessive Affixes'.

His Vocabulary is arranged under such headings as The Universe, The Stars, Parts of the Body, Trees and Shrubs. It contains a good deal of useful information, marred only by the erratic

transcription. It is not evidence, however, for his command of the language, any more than are his agreeable Dialogues. On page lxxii he mentions, among the products of the first Turkish printing-press, Holderman's *Grammaire turque* (Istanbul, 1730), of which he says, 'A Vocabulary and Dialogues are attached, which, though in many instances very inaccurate, have been of much service to me in composing the Vocabulary and Dialogues appended to this work.' The anonymous reviewer in the *Asiatic Journal* (see note 5) remarks, 'The Vocabulary and the Dialogues are evidently taken from Holderman; but they are much improved.' His use of 'evidently' suggests that he had overlooked Davids' own acknowledgment of his indebtedness.

Not everyone is so honest. I was looking at the section of his Dialogues which he entitles 'To Speak Turkish': 'They say you are well versed in the Turkish Language.' 'I wish it were so.' 'I assure you I have been told so.' 'Perhaps I have spoken a few words, which I got by heart.' 'Do not fear: the Turkish language is not so difficult.' 'If I speak wrongly, they laugh at me'. Now the word he uses for 'speak' is *söylemek*, for example the last sentence runs: *Yanlış soilrsem beni maskarah iderler*. Idly I wondered when *konusmak* began to supplant *söylemek*. So I turned to Captain C. F. Mackenzie's *Turkish Manual* (London, 1879), which I have always kept next to Mowle⁷ in the place of honour on my shelves, these being the only two books on the language that I could find in Blackwell's on that far-off day when I decided I wanted to learn Turkish. In fact I never made any use of Mackenzie's book, having soon found that it did not live up to his claim: 'if the student makes himself thoroughly acquainted with my "lytel boke," he will be enabled... to approach perfection in one of the most difficult languages of the East.' Anyway, I looked at it now, to see whether he had used *söylemek* or *konusmak*, and at once I saw that he had lifted his phrases entire from Arthur Lumley Davids, except that he had omitted Davids' endearing 'If I speak wrongly, they laugh at me.' I suppose that did not suit the proud spirit of this bluff soldier; an old officer, as he describes himself, of Sir Robert Vivian's Turkish Contingent, in Crimea.

7 A. C. Mowle, *The New Turkish* (London, 1939).

So the Dialogues which Davids offered his readers in 1832 originated a century before. When Mackenzie offered them to his 'fellow countrymen to enable them to dispense with the aid of those untrustworthy interpreters who are so prevalent in the Levant,' they were a hundred and fifty years old. It seems that untrustworthiness was not an exclusively Levantine characteristic.

As far as the language is concerned, I fear that the British contribution to Turkish studies was nothing to write home about until 1846, when James Redhouse published his first Turkish grammar⁸. If I may parody Alexander Pope's epigram on Sir Isaac Newton, 'Turkish and all its vowels lay hid in night. / God said *Let Redhouse be!* and all was light.'

8 *Grammaire raisonnée de la langue ottomane* (Paris, 1846).