

A TRIBUTE TO SEMİH TEZCAN

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One of the things Semih and I enjoyed discussing over the years of our solidifying friendship was the fact that we were the same age, both of us born in 1943. When I learned of his death in September of 2017, just weeks after we had spent some wonderful days working together on *İskendername*, I immediately thought of this verse from one of the *mersiyes* at the end of that work (8648):

Nëçün ètmedüñ ecel bebriyle ceng
Kodı gètđi yèrünđi ol gür-ı teng

“Why did you not struggle with the tiger of Destiny? It has gone and left you only a narrow grave.”

I first met Semih in 1983 at a Turcological conference at Indiana University. Then also much of our discussion revolved around *İskendername*. Semih presented me a copy of İsmail Ünver’s facsimile edition of that work, which had been published that same year and which I had used for my presentation at the Indiana conference.¹ Since we shared an interest in Turkish *mesnevis*, we toyed with the notion of one day working on the topic together. We had no inkling, of course, that our last collaborative effort would involve *İskendername*.

Old Turkic was another area of common interest, since Semih had published some Old Uigur texts while I had done work on the Karakhanid texts. Whenever we met over the subsequent years — whether in Bamberg, in Chicago, in Ankara or in Bodrum — we would discuss matters relating to Old Turkic and other Turcological topics.

But more and more our conversation focussed on Evliya Çelebi — an obsession of mine and an enthusiasm also shared with Semih’s wife, Nuran. Semih’s discovery of reports in some Ottoman archery books, that in his youth Evliya was a fine archer and a record holder, added significantly to the documentation about Evliya outside of his own work, *Seyahatname*.² When the two of us collaborated, we occasionally focussed on a small detail, such as Evliya’s use of a certain Turkish proverb.³ What I am especially grateful for is Semih’s generous

¹ Later published as “The Romance of Iskender and Gülshah,” in Sabri M. Akural, ed., *Turkic Culture: Continuity and Change* (Indiana University Press), 95-103.

² “Evliyâ Çelebi’nin Okçuluğu” (SEMİH TEZCAN’IN YAYINLARI: MAKALELER vs., no. 75).

³ “Seyahat-nâme’den Bir Atasözü” (SEMİH TEZCAN’IN YAYINLARI: MAKALELER vs., no. 50).

contribution to projects — the Glossary and the Bibliography — that, although begun by me, only attained mature fruition through his collaboration.⁴ Semih and Nuran together edited the fine collection of articles (some of the best ones written by themselves) published in celebration of Evliya's 400th birthday — a book whose English version I was pleased to oversee.⁵ Semih also envisioned two large collaborative projects — a concordance of *Seyahatname*⁶ and (as proposed by Yaşar Tonta) an online edition and cultural atlas — neither of which, unfortunately, has as yet gained traction.

Semih's generosity and enthusiasm in promoting my work meant that I profited from his collaboration more than he profited from mine. I was hoping to reverse that dynamic and, in the future, to assist in the completion of his unfinished projects. But Destiny decreed otherwise.

In September of 2015, with Semih's blessing, I embarked on a critical edition of *İskendername*. The way this came about was that İsmail Ünver, prior to his death in January of that year, passed on to Semih his transcription of the text, based on the manuscript whose facsimile he had published in 1983 (İÜKT 921 = A). Semih enlisted my help and, working together, we made many corrections to the typescript with the aim of bringing it to publishable form. Occasionally we checked the text against another manuscript that the Bibliothèque Nationale had put on line (Supplément turc 309 = B). The many discrepancies between these two oldest dated manuscripts of Ahmedi's maturest version of the work were evident and it became clear that making an edition would be preferable to publishing a transcription of a single manuscript. With Semih's help I procured copies of four other manuscripts in Turkish libraries (including Konya Mev. Müz. 97 = C) (I also got one from Venice and used the two in Paris available on line) and went to work. When all was nearly complete I went to Bodrum in August, 2017 and spent two weeks with Semih tying up loose ends and making the Turkish presentable. The following is an example of Semih's contribution.

At the end of the Mi'raj section, in the maturest version of the work (represented by AC, also in this instance attested in BN Supplément turc 635 = Q and in ms Laleli 1995 = La) we have (6482):

⁴ *Evliya Çelebi Seyahatnamesi Okuma Sözlüğü; "Evliya Çelebi Kaynakçası"* (SEMİH TEZCAN'IN YAYINLARI: MAKALELER vs., no. 17; no. 80); <https://lucian.uchicago.edu/blogs/ottomanturkish/files/2015/09/Evliya-Celebi-Bibliography.September-2015.pdf>.

⁵ *Evlîyâ Çelebi; Evlîyâ Çelebi – Studies and Essays Commemorating the 400th Anniversary of his Birth* (SEMİH TEZCAN'IN YAYINLARI: EDİTÖRLÜK ETKİNLİKLERİ, no. 5; no. 6).

⁶ "Evliya Çelebi Seyahatnamesi Tümdizini (Concordance)" (SEMİH TEZCAN'IN YAYINLARI: MAKALELER vs., no. 63).

Ol seferden döndi ol gece gèrü
Merkeze geldi Muḥammed'den berü

As we puzzled over this verse, Semih realized two things: that *merkez* in this context means “earth” (since Muhammad descends from the heavens); and that *'den berü* must be an error. Recalling, from other Mi'raj accounts in other *mesnevis*, that Muhammad returns in the middle of the night, he immediately suggested the emendation: *dün yaru* meaning “midnight”. At first I objected to this, and we argued over it for about an hour. I pointed out that ms **A**, while sometimes in error, can invariably be corrected by recourse to **C**; but where **A** and **C** agree (and in this case they also agree with the other attestations of the verse), there is no reason to doubt the reading. I also pointed out that while *dün yarısı* is amply attested (see *Tarama Sözlüğü* 1314-1316), *dün yaru* is nowhere attested. Eventually my reluctance to emend the text without further evidence was outweighed by Semih's argument. The context requires a phrase meaning “at midnight” and Ahmedi must have written *dün yaru* to rhyme with *gèrü*. The copyist of the prototype of all attested versions did not understand this phrase and so substituted the more familiar (though here ungrammatical) *'den berü*. I now consider this to be a brilliant emendation of the text, offered by Semih and incorporated by me in my edition: *Merkeze geldi Muḥammed dün yaru* “Muhammad came back to earth at midnight.”

Semih applied the same philological finesse to the difficult texts he has edited (including especially *Yazıcıoğlu Oğuznamesi*), returning to them again and again to try and solve the remaining puzzles, leaving them unpublished because of this sense of perfectionism. I hope, in what years remain to me before my own struggle with the tiger of Destiny, to do what I can to promote the publication of these valuable editions.

