THE CONCEPT OF "STRENGTH" IN TURKISH

Németh Armağan'ndan ayrıbasım
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GERARD CLAUSON (London)

The Royal Asiatic Society, with the wide range of studies which it is obliged by its Royal Charter to foster, is bound to choose its Honorary Fellows from an equally wide range of disciplines. Of the thirty Honorary Fellows only two are Turcologists, and the Society takes some modest pride in the fact that they are the only two foreign Turcologists whom the Türk Dil Kurumu has decided to honour with an Armağan, Prof. Deny and Prof. Németh.

It gives me particular pleasure, as President for the time being of the Society, to contribute to the Armağan of one of our most distinguished Honorary Fellows. Of Prof. Németh's many contributions to Turcology perhaps the most remarkable are his detailed studies of the finer points of philology and phonology. It is with this consideration in mind that I have chosen as my contribution what may seem at first sight to be a rather trivial theme, the precise meaning of three Turkish words.

The word "strength" in English has a good many shades of meaning. Primarily it is applied to a human being or animal and means the physical ability to do something difficult (for example to lift a heavy weight or break something very tough) or to resist external force. It can also be used of mental qualities, as in such phrases as "strength of mind", and can be applied to inanimate objects, as in such phrases as "the strength of a chain lies in its weakest link". In some of these meanings it is synonymous with "might", which is however almost obsolete in modern English, and in some with "power", but neither these three nouns, nor their adjectives, "strong", "mighty" and "powerful", are completely synonymous and interchangeable. For example, if we go to a circus we quite expect to see a "strong man", but we should be greatly surprised if he was described as a "mighty" or "powerful" one. Conversely we speak, in a political context,
of the "Great Powers", but we should not call them "Strengths" or "Mights".

We find much the same position in other European languages. In a well-known English-French dictionary "strength" is translated force, "might" force, puissance and "power" force, puissance, pouvoir and in an English-German dictionary, "strength" is translated Stärke, Kraft, "might" Kraft, Macht, Gewalt and "power" those same three words and Vermögen as well. In short, in all these languages, and probably most others, there are several words to a greater or less degree synonymous which have the general connotation of being able to do difficult things or resist external force, particularly, but not only, in a physical sense, and each of these words has slightly different meanings. This fact has led to a good deal of lack of precision in translating words in other languages, Turkish among them.

It seems pretty clear that in the Turkish languages, apart from a few loan words like kuvet and kudret which have found their way into some of them, there is only one word which means "strength" in the sense described above. That word, in a broad transcription, is küç. The original form is likely to have been kć with a long vowel and a voiced final. The evidence for this is that in Mahmud al-Kâşgâri's Diwānu’l-ʿUḫṭāt-i-turk, the most reliable authority on the length of vowels in early Turkish, the word is spelt with a long vowel, and long vowels are normally followed by voiced consonants. This theory is further confirmed by the fact that in Osmanlı and Republican Turkish, which have preserved the quality of final consonants better than almost any other Turkish languages, the pronunciation is giçe. Nevertheless in the earliest Turkish languages now known to us, Türkî, Uygur and Xakani, all final voiced consonants were devoiced and the word was no doubt pronounced kć, just as at "name" was pronounced at. This is confirmed by the fact that when the word was borrowed in 13th Century Mongolian, it was given the form kćūr in accordance with the phonetic law that foreign words with unvoiced (but not voiced) final consonants have a short vowel, sometimes followed by an unstable -n, attached to them.

kć : č "strength" and kć elğ "strong" existed in the earliest Turkish languages known to us, and still survive, with minor phonetic variations, to this day. The noun has always meant and still means "strength", with emphasis more particularly on the physical aspect. At an early date it acquired the additional meaning "violence", that is strength wrongly used, and in one or two modern languages it has acquired another additional meaning "difficulty", that is something the strength of which puts one at a disadvantage.

In the Orkhon inscriptions we find such phrases as teqri : kć bē :rtük üçên "because Heaven gave him strength (the army of my father the Kağan was like a wolf and his enemies like sheep)", I E 12, II E 11 and (the Turkish heges obeyed the Chinese Emperor and) elğ yīl işīk kćūr bē :rmiq, "gave them their labour and strength for fifty years", I E 8, II E 8. In the Irk Bitig the phrase andağ kćūl men, "I am so strong", occurs three times (pages 5, 32, 93).

Both words are common in Uyğur. For example, in Pelliot's La version ouigoure de l'histoire des princes Kalyanamhara et Papamhara, T'oung Pao XV, 1914, we find inçip avetça aruki yetti kćūr alarattı (so read!) tebreyü yoryu umadi "then the old man was overcome by exhaustion, his strength failed and he could not move or walk", 37, 1 ff., and ulğ kćūl kulağ Bodhsativ ertemser "if he were not a great, strong, divinely protected Bodhisattva (he would never have reached this country)", 45, 2 ff.

Kć is common in Kağari. The main entry is in I H 120, where it is translated al-quipa "strength" and also al-ulam "violence", the latter attested by the proverb kć : ēldin kirse : tőrő : türilikin čıkə "if violence comes in from the court-yard

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1 I refer to this work in future as Kağari; all quotations from it are from the TDK edition, the references in Roman and Arabic numerals being to the volume and page of Besim Atalay's translation.


3 Quotations from these inscriptions and the Irk Bitig are from H. N. Orkun, Eski Türk Yazarları, Istanbul, 1936 ff., with the spelling revised on the lines explained in my article The Turkish Y and Related Sounds in Studia Altaica, Wiesbaden, 1957.
“(mina’l-efna), law and order go out of the window (mina’l-żuwana).”

The author adds that küçemči: al-zalim, “oppressor”, and kü çilgig al-żuwana “strong” are derived from this word.

It is unnecessary to trace the history of this word any further; it is common in all languages and at all periods. In the Turkish (Kipcak etc.) Arabic vocabularies it is usually translated al-żuwana.

There is a wide spread belief that there are two other words in early Turkish, erk and türk, which mean “strength”, but careful examination of the contexts in which they occur show that this is an error.

Erk is an old word which, unlike küç, does not survive in any modern language. The latest trace of it is in 15th Century Çağatay, where it was still current. It had two basic meanings,

(1) “authority”, that is the ability to impose one’s will on others and (2) “free will”, that is freedom to decide for oneself without being subject to the authority of someone else. Admittedly “authority” is not very different from “power” or “power” from “strength”, and that is no doubt why the word has come to be translated “strength”, but the result is that the exact meaning of the passages in which it occurs has been missed. For example, Prof. von Le Coq mistranslated the earliest passage in which it occurs in his article “Dr. Stein’s Turkish Khastuanifst from Tun-huang”, J. R. A. S., April, 1911. This text is a Manichaean “confession of sins” and one of the sins confessed is blasphemy, one example of which is mentioned in lines 22 ff. in the following words, yeme kǔn ay ilig tèdimiz erser erksizin toqar bar. erki bar erser toqmasun tèdimiz erser, which von Le Coq translated “if we should have said; the God of the Sun and Moon dies and his rise and his setting is void of strength: should he own strength, (then) he shall not rise”. This frankly makes very little sense; the real meaning is “if we have said, ‘the sun and moon die’ or ‘they rise and set because they are not free to do, otherwise; if they are free to do as they like, let them not rise’. It is, however, only fair to say that in this same text erklig occurs in a context which gave von Le Coq some excuse for supposing that it meant “mighty”. A little before the passage just quoted, in lines 18 ff., occur the words yeme kirti ertik kiliçtig terži têpen kirtkunmedimiz erser “if we have not believed that they (i.e. the Sun and Moon Gods) are true Gods, free to do as they wish (not, as von Le Coq translated, “mighty”) and strong”.

Erk is probably equally old in the sense of “authority”. It occurs, for example, in the Uygur text edited by Pelliot which was quoted above, and here again the translation was just slightly wrong. The word occurs in page 27,4 in the following context. Prince Kalyanamakara had decided to set out on a dangerous journey; the people were greatly distressed; but the King, his father said tdu umadam (sic) erkiit tökmehedi erksiz türmen. Pelliot translated this, ... Je n’ai pas pu l’empêcher; ma puissance a été insuffisante; je l’envoie sans force [pour le retenir]”. Actually it means, “I could not stop him. My authority was insufficient, so, not being free to do as I wish, I send him away”. There are other instances of erk in Uygur, some of them quoted below, in association with türk.

The earliest occurrence of erklig is in the concluding words of the Irk Bitig (page 102), ançp alku : kentii : üligi : erklıyülpl “thus everyone is master of his own destiny”.

Erk occurs only once in Kaşgari, in I 43, where it is translated al-saltana wa nasıddu’amr “political power and effective authority”, but it occurs several times in the Kutadgu Bilig. In verse 639 Ayoldt says to the King, bar erse yasukum kar erk sana, “if I am at fault, punish me; you have the authority (or “you are free to decide whether”) to do so”. Again in verse 940 he says to him, ajun erki buluren “you have acquired authority over the world”.

In the 13th.(?) Century Atebetu’l-Hakayik, verse 256, there is a good example of erklig meaning “having authority over someone else”, kul ol malka mals ana erklig ol, “he is a slave to wealth, his wealth is his master”.

Erk also occurs in the 14th. Century Nahcu’l-Feradis page 360,8, where Zalixa and her daya are discussing Yusuf, and the
daya says “if he obeys your command, then he obeys; but if he does not, do not let him go; öş külür' turur ne erki bolğay, “he is your own slave; so what liberty of action should he have?”

In the 14th Century Arabic-Turkish vocabulary Hilyatu'l-insan ve ähltatu'l-lisan by Camâlu'l-dîn ibn Muhannâ 7 page 145, in a list of words used for various dignitaries, (the first entry is al-malîk xakan), şâhib farmaän “a person in authority” is translated erklîq (the alfî has a kasra).

In Çağatay érk (spelt with alif yâ) is translated ıxiyîr “free will, liberty to choose” in the Aświya (V. de Veliaminof Zernof, Dictionnaire Djaghatai-Turc, St. Petersburg, 1869) p. 51, and ıxiyîr ve qudrat in the Sanglax of Mirza Mahdi Xan (fol. 99v. 21 of the Gibb Memorial Trust MS.).

The word also occurs in Kipcak; erkh is translated al-ıxiyîr in the 14th Century Kitáb al-idrâk li-lîsin al-Atxâr, edited by Çaferoğlu, Istanbul, 1931 p. 11, and the 15th Century Etihet-ızâzekîyle fil-liğat-it-türkîyye, fol. 90 b. 10 of the TDK facsimile, Istanbul, 1945. In 14th Century Koman 8 it means both “authority” and “free will” and erkli erksiz is used to mean “nolens volens, willy nilly”.

Finally there are two examples of erkh in Tankâriyîle Tarama Şöbulû 1, TDK 1943; (I quote from this book in the spelling used therein). The first is from Yunus Emre's Dîvan, where the word might mean either “authority” or “freedom of choice”, but the latter meaning is abundantly clear in the 14th Century Old Osmauli version of the Kisisi Enbiya, Lokman'ı Peygamberlikle • hakimlik arasunda erkh verildi, pes hakimlik ihtiyar kaldı, “Lokman was given a free choice between becoming a prophet and becoming a sage, and chose to become a sage”. In the same text Lokman is quoted as saying eger Tanrım beni erklî kilarsa, “if God gives me freedom of choice”.

It should be added that erkh like kûç became an early loan word in Mongolian; in accordance with the phonetic law quoted above it became erke. The word itself does not actually occur in the Secret History of the Mongols, which was compiled in the middle of the 13th Century from earlier material, but the derived adjective does in the phrase erketi tenggiri 9 which is an exact reproduction of erkilî terî. Erke is still current in modern Mongolian and is translated “power, authority, right, force, capacity, will” in the Modern Mongolian Practical Dictionary published by the Evangelical Alliance Mission, Chicago, 1949-53, p. 56. It was probably this Mongolian word erke which found its way back into Çağatay with the particular connotation of the power of a beautiful woman to influence her lover. It appears, for example, in the Aświya, page 14, where it is translated niz ve şive ve kustahlik “coquetry, amorous glance, impudence”, and survives with this and cognate meanings, “fondling; loving treatment and care; beloved, cherished”, and the like in most modern Turkish languages, (see, W. Radloff, Versuch eines Wörterbuches der Türk-dialekte, St. Petersburg, 1888 ff, I 776, 777 and 1464.) and even in 20th. Century Anatolia, but only among refugees, (see Söz Derleme Dergisi TDK, 1941, II 436). As there is no trace of the word with this or any other meaning in Turkish before the 14th Century, it is difficult to explain it in any other way.

Finally we come to türk (or törk?). It is now practically a dogma, but only a very recent one, that this word means “strength” and that the tribal and national name Türk was derived from it. This statement was, for example, made categorically in Prof. A. von Cabaines paper, Hunnish-Türkische Beziehungen in Zeki Velidi Togan’a Armağan, TDK, 1955, p. 5(18) but actually originated some forty years earlier. In my article, A Note on Qoppun, J. R. A. S., 1956, p. 76, I objected to this theory on three grounds, (1) that the original form of the name was Türkü, not Türk; (2) that türk did not mean “strength”; (3) that Türk, the name, and türk (or törk?) the noun, are listed side by side in Karšarî without any suggestion of an etymological connexion between the two, although the author was only too anxious to find meanings for proper names whenever possible.

The theory that türk meant “strength” seems first to have been propounded by F. W. K. Müller in Uigurica II, Abhand-
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The words ol yeme Seni ırniş Ragagayini atal kişişi türk yigit erdi, “and that man Sêna’s wife, Ragagayini by name, was a young woman in the prime of her youth”. In her husband’s absence on a trading voyage abroad she fell violently in love with his younger brother Upasêna, and in the course of a declaration of love to him said, sen yeme türk yigit seh, (page 82, line 15).

All the other occurrences of türk in Uyghur seem to be in association with erk. For example it occurs in a passage of metaphysical content in Müller’s Uigurica II. This describes the so-called “nidadıa series” and says (page 9, lines 13 ff.) ol ok tegimek tilaştında ajunolarda ed tavarka erke türkçe aslanmak turur” as a result of that perception (vedana), desire (ışna) for rebirths, for material possessions, inanimate and animate, for freedom of will (sîc, rather than “authority” in this context) and for the prime of life arises”.

A very similar phrase occurs as a sort of refrain in the Tişastestik, a Buddhist stûra published by Radloff in Bibliotheca Buddhica XII, St. Petersburg, 1910. This work, which is incomplete, contains a series of more or less identical sections within an outer framework. Each section begins with a list of Buddhist deities or the like and invokes their protection on the reader; its concluding paragraph says, in summary, “may they give you various benefits, protect you, take away your anxiety and fear, (here follow the words below) may your affairs prosper, and may you live to be a hundred years old”. The words which interest us, and which occur in 19 a 4, 20 a 5, 21 b 1 and several later places are, aş barım ed tavark erk türkünizleri asılmak bolun, “may there be an increase of your wealth and property, your material possessions, inanimate and animate, your free will and your prime of life”.

This translation is clumsy, but hard to improve without paraphrasing the text. The actual meaning of the closing words, read with what follows, clearly is, “may you remain in the prime of life until you reach the age of a hundred years”. This seems a very appropriate sentiment with which to conclude an article addressed to the distinguished scholar in whose honour this volume has been compiled.

The phrase also occurs in the Kûladik: Bilij veş (your father was under before you) erk türk tige “even authority and enjoying the prime of life”.

lungen der Königlichen Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1910, p. 97. Müller, who was of course writing before Kaşgari was rediscovered, and so could not consult that work, may reasonably be regarded as the first modern scholar to discover the word, since although it occurs in the Tişastestik (see below) Radloff took it to be the proper name Türk. Müller seems to have had no better reason for giving it this meaning than that it was used in association with erk, but he may have been influenced by the fact that Radloff, in the Versuch-III 1560, translated it tapfer, roh “brave, tough”, with a reference to Babur. The passage in question (fol. 175 v. 4 of the Haydaraabad MS., E. J. W. Gibb Memorial Vol. I, London, 1905) says that a certain Teşniberdi türk wa murdana wa kilçilik beg idi. Mrs. Beveridge (The Memoirs of Babur, II. 279), however, translated this “was a plain, bold sword-slaying brave” taking türk as the proper name used in the sense of “a simple, ordinary tribesman”, as opposed to “courtier”, a meaning which it also had in Osmanli (see Radloff; loc. cit.).

The noun türk seems to be known only in Uyghur and Kaşgari, and there is therefore no means of telling whether it was pronounced türk or türk; a discussion of its meaning can conveniently start with the definition of it in the latter, I 353. It follows immediately after a long paragraph about Türk, the proper name, and reads as follows: türk ʃarʃ yaʃa ‘ala’la-waqt, wa huwa waʃt ʃidrak kall ᵂay yiniş ʃay’ mina’li-ʃimbar; yuqal minhu türk üzüm ʃid: ay annahu waʃt tawasusil’i-ʃinan fi yan’ihi; wa yuqal türk kuya: ʃid: ay waʃt tawasusil’-ʃamal; wa yuqal türk yigit ay ʃab tawasusat sababahu, “türk is an indeclinable word relating to time, that is the culminating point of maturity of any kind of fruit; hence one says türk üzüm ʃid: ‘the time when grapes become fully ripe’; and one say türk kuya: ʃid: ‘the time when the sun is at the zenith’; and one says türk yigit ‘a young man in the prime of his youth’”. The purport of this is clear, türk means the critical point in time when development reaches a climax and decline has not set in.

The phrase türk yigit occurs in Uyghur. In F. W. K. Müller, Uigurica III, A. P. A. W., 1920, there is a translation of a Buddhist story about a man called Sêna. In page 81 lines 2 ff. occur