

with kind regards  
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THE CONCEPT OF "STRENGTH" IN TURKISH

Németh Armağanı'ndan ayıbasım

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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 *kuvvet* 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 *kü:c* with a long vowel and a voiced final. The evidence for this is that in Mahmud al-Kāşgari's *Diwānu'lluġāti-l-türk*<sup>1</sup>, 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 Osmanli and Republican Turkish, which have preserved the quality of final consonants better than almost any other Turkish languages, the pronunciation is *güc*. Nevertheless in the earliest Turkish languages now known to us, Türkü, Uyğur and Xakani, all final voiced consonants were devoiced and the word was no doubt pronounced *kü:c*, just as *a:d* "name" was pronounced *a:t*. This is confirmed by the fact that when the word was borrowed in 13th Century Mongolian, it was given the form

<sup>1</sup> I refer to this work in future as Kaşgari; 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.

*küçü(n)*<sup>2</sup> 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.

*kü:c* "strength" and *kü:çlüg* "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<sup>3</sup> we find such phrases as *teŕri:küç bé:rtük ücün* "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 begs obeyed the Chinese Emperor and) *ellig yıl işig küçig bé:rmış*, "gave him their labour and strength for fifty years" I E 8, II E 8. In the Irk Bitig the phrase *andağ küçlüg 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 Kalyanamkara et Papamkara*, T'oung Pao XV, 1914, we find *inçip awıçğa aruki yetti küci alarattı* (so read!) *tebreyü yorıyu umadı* "then the old man was overcome by exhaustion, his strength failed and he could not move or walk", 37, 1 ff., and *uluğ küçlüg kutluğ Bodıswıt ermeser* "if he were not a great, strong, divinely protected Bodhisattva (he would never have reached this country)", 45, 2 ff.

*Kü:c* is common in Kaşgari. The main entry is in III 120, where it is translated *al-quwwa* "strength" and also *al-ẓulm* "violence", the latter attested by the proverb *kü:c é:ldin kirse:törü:türlükün çıka:r* "if violence comes in from the court-yard

<sup>2</sup> See N. Poppe, *The Mongolian Monuments in hPags-pa Script*, Wiesbaden, 1957, p. 126.

<sup>3</sup> Quotations from these inscriptions and the Irk Bitig are from H. N. Orkun, *Eski Türk Yazıtları*, 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-fina’), law and order go out of the window (mina'l-k-uwwa)”.

The author adds that *küçemçi*: *al-zalim*, “oppressor”, and *kü:çlüg al-qawwi* “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 (Kıpçak etc.) -Arabic vocabularies it is usually translated *al-quwwa*.

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 Khuastuanift 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 kün ay ölür tédimiz erser erksizin toğar batar erki bar erser toğmazun tédimiz 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 kirtü erklig küçlüg tenri tépen kirkünmedimiz 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 Uyğur 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 Kalyanamkara had decided to set out on a dangerous journey; the people were greatly distressed; but the King, his father said *tıdu umadam* (sic;) *erkim tükemedi erksiz ıdurmen*. 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 Uyğur, 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), *ançıp alku: kentü: ülügi: erkli:şğol* “thus everyone is master of his own destiny”.

*Erk* occurs only once in Kaşğari, in I 43, where it is translated *al-saltana wa nafādu’l-amr* “political power and effective authority”, but it occurs several times in the *Kutadğu Bilig*<sup>4</sup>. In verse 639 Aytoldı says to the King, *bar erse yazukum kına 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 bulduñ* “you have acquired authority over the world”.

In the 13th.(?) Century *Atebetu’l-Hakayik*<sup>5</sup> verse 256, there is a good example of *erklig* meaning “having authority over someone else”, *kul ol malka mah ana erklig ol*, “he is a slave to wealth, his wealth is his master”.

*Erk* also occurs in the 14th. Century *Nahcu’l-Feradis*<sup>6</sup> page 360,8, where Zalixa and her *daya* are discussing Yusuf, and the

<sup>4</sup> I quote from R. R. Arat’s edition, TDK, 1947.

<sup>5</sup> I quote from R. R. Arat’s edition, TDK, 1951.

<sup>6</sup> I quote from the TDK facsimile, Ankara, 1956.

*daya* says "if he obeys your command, then he obeys; but if he does not, do not let him go; *öz kuluñ 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-insân wa halbatu'l-lisân* by Camâlu'l-dîn ibn Muhannâ<sup>7</sup> page 145, in a list of words used for various dignitaries, (the first entry is *al-malik xakan*), *şâhib farmân* "a person in authority" is translated *érklig* (the *alif* has a *kasra*).

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

The word also occurs in Kıpçak; *erk* is translated *al-ixtiyâr* in the 14th Century *Kitâb al-idrâk li-lisân al-Atrâk*, edited by Caferoğlu, Istanbul, 1931 p. 11, and the 15th Century *Ettuhfet-üzzekeyye fil-lûgat-it-türkiyye*, fol. 90 b. 10 of the TDK facsimile, Istanbul, 1945. In 14th Century Koman<sup>8</sup> it means both "authority" and "free will" and *erkli erksiz* is used to mean "nolens volens, willy nilly".

Finally there are two examples of *erk* in *Tanıklariyle Tarama Sözlüğü I*, TDK 1943; (I quote from this book in the spelling used therein). The first is from Yunus Emre's *Divan*, where the word might mean either "authority" or "freedom of choice", but the latter meaning is abundantly clear in the 14th Century Old Osmanli version of the *Kisasi Enbiya*, *Lokman'a Peygamberlikle hakimlik arasında erk verildi, pes hakimlik ihtiyar kıldı*, "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 erkli kılursa*, "if God gives me freedom of choice".

It should be added that *erk* like *küç* 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

<sup>7</sup> I quote from Kilisli Rif'at's edition, Istanbul, 1921

<sup>8</sup> I quote from K. Grönbech, *Komanisches Wörterbuch*, Copenhagen, 1942 p. 92.

middle of the 13th. Century from earlier material, but the derived adjective does in the phrase *erketü tenggiri*<sup>9</sup> which is an exact reproduction of *erklig tenri*. *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 *Abuşka*, page 14, where it is translated *naz ve şive ve küstahlık* "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-dialecte*, 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 Gabain's paper, *Hunnisch-Türkische Beziehungen in Zeki Velidi Toğan'a Armağan*, TDK, 1955, p. 5(18) but actually originated some forty years earlier. In my article, *A Note on Qapqan*, 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 Kaşgari 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-

<sup>9</sup> See E. Haenisch, *Wörterbuch zu Manghol un niuca tobca'an*, Leipzig, 1939, p. 45.

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 *Tiştavustik* (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 Haydarabad MS., E. J. W. Gibb Memorial Vol. I, London, 1905) says that a certain Teşriberdi *türk wa murdana wa kışçlık beg idi*. Mrs. Beveridge (*The Memoirs of Babur*, II 279), however, translated this "was a plain, bold sword-slashing 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 Uyğur and Kaşgari, and there is therefore no means of telling whether it was pronounced *türk* or *törk*; 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 harf yaqa' ala'l-waqt, wa huwa waşt idrāk kull şay' mina'l-timār; yuqāl minhu türk üzüm ö:di: ay annahu waqt tawassuṭi'l-inab fi yan'ihī; wa yuqāl türk kuya:ş ö:di: ay waqt tawassuṭi'l-şams; wa yuqāl türk yigit ay şabb tawassat şabābuhu*, "*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 ö:di*: 'the time when grapes become fully ripe'; and one say *türk kuya:ş ö:di*: '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 Uyğur, In F. W. K. Müller, *Uigurica III*, A. P. A. W., 1920, there is a translation of a Buddhist story about a man called Séna. In page 81 lines 2 ff. occur

the words *ol yeme Séni erniñ Ragagayini atlıg kişisi türk yigit erdi*, "and that man Séna'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 Upaséna, and in the course of a declaration of love to him said, *sen yeme türk yigit señ*, (page 82, line 15).

All the other occurrences of *türk* in Uyğur 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 "*nidāna* series" and says (page 9, lines 13 ff.) *ol ok teginmek tıtağında ajunlarka eđ tavarka erkke türkke azlanmak turur* as a result of that perception (*vedana*), desire (*tüşna*) for rebirths, for material possessions, inanimate and animate, for freedom of will (*sic*, 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 *Tiştavustik*, a Buddhist sūtra 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, *ağı barım eđ tavar erk türkünüzler aşılmak bolzun*, "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 Kutadğū: Bilig vers (your father was ruler before you) erk türk tüze "exercise authority and enjoying the prime of life"*