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## 17th-century Italian-Turkish Dictionaries

### Abstract

The first Italian-Turkish dictionary was published in Rome in 1641. Turks and Italians, however, had already been in contact for almost 600 years. The following centuries witnessed the production of various Turkish-Italian and Italian-Turkish dictionaries but the pioneer works of the 17th century must have played a significant role. A closer look at the circumstances which gave birth to four dictionaries between 1641 and 1680, their authors and the dictionaries themselves reveals why these works should not go unnoticed as they have done so far.

### 1. Introduction

"One can limit the study of lexicography to dictionaries and similar books dealing with language, but the context can be wider...and I do not think we can grasp what lexicographers do without that wider historical, socio-cultural and technological context."(McArthur 1994)

It is indeed impossible to ignore the socio-economic, political and religious circumstances when examining the 17th-century Italian-Turkish dictionaries. The creation of four dictionaries between 1641 and 1680 was, to a great extent, stimulated by the conditions of the day and place their authors lived in. In fact, contrary to the belief that it was mainly missionaries and monks who undertook lexicographic practice, three dictionaries of the time were compiled by the *Dragomanni* i.e. the interpreters at the Ottoman Court. Their efforts to compile dictionaries in spite of unfavourable circumstances confirm that there were "potential information needs to be met" (Hartmann 1992) between the two cultures.

### 2. Historical outline

The crusades starting in 1096 can be taken as the first contact between Italians and Turks, who had arrived in Anatolia with the battle of Manzikert in 1071. The settlement of the crusaders in the area of Antiochia stimulated the activities of the mercantile Italian republics, namely Venice and Genoa. As well as the Mediterranean and the Aegean Sea, Genoese and Venetian traders sailed through the Dardanelles and the Bosphorus, reaching the Crimea and establishing their colonies on the Black Sea as early as the 13th century. Both republics managed to avoid clashes with the growing Ottoman state as they were interested in smooth commercial relations, and often concluded treaties with Turks obtaining privileges. On some occasions they

even supported the military expeditions of the Ottomans with their ships. Especially after 1453, with the seizure of Constantinople and Galata, where Italians had long established naval industries, the Ottoman navy grew in size and importance. "One might assume, therefore, that their influence upon Turks, in trade and navigation as well as in the respective terminologies involved, was dominant from the earliest contacts of the Turkic tribes with the sea and seafaring." (Kahane & Tietze, 1988).

Both republics, as well as Tuscany and Naples, held embassies in Constantinople and in other important coastal towns such as the Dardanelles, Smirne, Salonico and inland, Adrianapoli (Di Vittorio, A., 1979; Schreiber, G., 1980). Their fruitful commercial and diplomatic ties with the Ottomans encouraged Italian travellers to visit these places and write travel memoirs. In fact, starting from the mid-1500's to the beginning of our century many such travel books were published in Italy describing various aspects of life in the Ottoman Empire. Also the ambassadors had to come back with a detailed report on their experiences in the Orient to be presented to the Court. It was expressed by the ambassadors and travellers themselves that 'translation' was a serious problem in Constantinople. It was in the hand of the Jewish citizens "who spoke all the languages" but were not completely reliable in their translations, for various reasons (Mantegazza, C. 1805; Alberi, E. 1839; Tormene, A., 1904; Schreiber, G. 1980; Yetkin, Ç. 1992).

Turkish invasions in Italy contributed to the cultural exchange as well. Even today the abundance of surnames such as *Turchi*, *Del Turco*, *Turchetti* etc. in Italy, explains the existence, at some stage, of Turkish communities formed by those left behind from the Ottoman army and navy after the invasions in the coastal areas (Calabria, Cesena etc) and inland (Friuli).

We owe quite a few dictionaries to the efforts of the missionaries, yet another group who established themselves in the Levant. In fact, the order of Capuchines had started their mission in Georgia in 1661. When their activity was banned in 1845 by Russia the missionaries had to look for a new base and chose Trebisonda on the Black Sea coast. It is not only the Capuchines but also the Franciscans and Mechitarists who have contributed to the production of Italian-Turkish dictionaries over the past 350 years.

### 3. The seventeenth century

The seventeenth century was the beginning of the period of stagnation for the Ottoman empire, the battle of Lepanto having taken place in 1571. However, they were still a serious threat for Europe, especially for Vienna from the 1660's to the end of the century. From the 1640's onwards there was continuous friction between the Venetians and the Ottomans in the Aegean over the island of Crete. In spite of these unfavourable circumstances four Italian-Turkish dictionaries were published between 1641 and 1680.

#### 4. Problems of Turkish lexicography

Any lexicographer dealing with Turkish had to face the problem of 'how much of which language' to include in his dictionary. As Tietze put it "...the Turkish of the last 500 years was... the language of the Ottoman dynasty, of the court, of the bureaucracy, of the capital...in which Persian and Arabic became dominant....Consequently, if an Ottoman dictionary-maker wanted his dictionary to be adequate, he had to include, apart from the Turkish words..." Arabic and Persian, as well (Tietze 1962). There was also the problem of 'which alphabet', as Turkish was then written with Arabic letters, as well as the representation of the letters which did not exist in Italian. In fact, two of the 17th-century dictionaries used Latin letters to write Turkish each adopting different ways of representing the unfamiliar sounds. Also the vowels were often omitted in the Arabic-Turkish script which created problems for the lexicographer who tried to assign Latin characters to it.

#### 5. The dictionaries

##### 5.1 Molino, Giovanni. 1641. *Dittionario della Lingua Italiana-Turchesca*. Rome: A. M. Gioiosi..

Molino compiled his dictionary upon requests from the Court of Venice. In fact, he had been at the service of Venetian ambassadors in Constantinople as an interpreter and had also written a grammar of Turkish.

Although it was not more than a small size pocket dictionary of 494 pages it is interesting to note that Molino was a pioneer in his attempt to write Turkish using the Latin alphabet. This he did, as he explained in the introduction, to facilitate the pronunciation for the Italian user.

After the two-page dedication, the 4-page 'To the Reader' section gives a brief introduction to the history and origins of the Ottomans. Molino, like the others, was aware of the difficulties the compilation of such a dictionary would bring. He described Turkish as a mixture of Arabic, Persian, Greek and Tartar. Although he assured the reader that the origin of words was indicated throughout the dictionary with the initial letters of these languages (a, p, g, t) we come across very few entries with such symbols.

He included an 80-page index giving page and line numbers, a list of the languages spoken all over the Ottoman Empire, and a list of the countries then under the Ottoman rule. There is also a 7-page grammar and errata corripge page at the end.

Entries do not offer any information except for the equivalents ranging between one to four as in:

Stirpe, razza ] Ban. Ginsz. Oghiak. Boi.

There is a square bracket separating the entry and the equivalent, and in the case of two or more equivalents a full stop is used between the meanings. There are occasional references to grammatical categories as for example in:

Parlare, Verbo ] Soile–mek.

Related words and expressions are listed as separate entries such as:

stà con Dio, sta in pace – stà mane – stà sera – stà sopra di te – stà in cervello  
– stà sano

## **5.2 Da Parigi, Bernardo. 1665. *Vocabolario Italiano Turchesco*. Rome: Stamperia Della Sacra Congregazione di Propaganda Fide.**

Although it is mentioned in the front that this dictionary was translated from French into Italian by Padre Pietro da Albavilla there is no other information about him or his efforts. This dictionary was printed in 3 volumes by the *Stamperia della Sacra Congregazione di Propaganda Fide* in Rome and bore the message *pro usu missionariorum*. As the publisher's name suggests Bernardo Da Parigi was a Capuchine missionary. The order of Capuchines had started operating in Georgia, which then belonged to the Ottoman Empire, only four years earlier, in 1661. Padre Bernardo lived for many years in Aleppo, Constantinople and Palestine, where he had learnt Arabic as well.

Bernardo da Parigi, in his 2311–page 3–volume dictionary, used the Arabic letters for the Turkish equivalents. He knew this would cause difficulty to the user. However, as he explained in the front, to aim at Latin transcription would have limited the use of this dictionary since speakers of various European languages were used to different symbols. He illustrated this with the example *sevmif*: "Italians would write *sevmisc*, the French *sevmich*, the Polish *sevmiz* and the Germans, Hungarians, British, Dutch would all propose different systems" therefore following the original form would be the best.

Each entry has quite a few equivalents which again is the result of the language mixture the Ottomans used. To help the user understand the origin of these words he placed *t* (Turkish) or *a* (Arabic) or *p* (Persian) over each equivalent. The equivalents, always presented in the order of Turkish first, Arabic second and Persian third, are separated by an asterisk. There is no grammatical information given and we find only the corrections at the back. However, as we understand from the foreword, a grammar book was to be produced under separate cover.

**5.3 Mascis, Antonio. 1677. *Vocabolario Toscano e Turchesco*. Florence: N Navesi.**

Originally from Naples, Mascis published his 353-page, single-volume, small format dictionary under the patronage of Cosimo III, the Grand Duke of Tuscany whom he had served as interpreter. He therefore lived in Constantinople for 12 years in close contact with the Court. He followed Molino in his use of Latin letters for the Turkish equivalents although he had probably not seen either his or Padre Bernardo's dictionary as his entries and their equivalents seem to be completely different. His dictionary, indeed, had a core of entries from the Tuscany dialect but he also consulted the dictionary of the Accademia della Crusca to enrich his work with common Italian words. His reason for adopting the Latin script, compared to Molino, was even more practical. As he explained in his introduction, this would make the book more useful in everyday situations such as shopping. He included a pronunciation guide as well as a 38-page grammar and an appendix of numbers, days of the week, months and a list of Ottoman sultans in chronological order. He had heard of his contemporary Meninski, though, about whom he wrote: "To my knowledge another Turkish-Latin dictionary is being printed in Vienna by a Polish scholar....who will not only offer many more words but also a superb print".

After the 5-page dedication to the Grand Duke of Tuscany, he included a detailed description of the Ottoman language and culture. There is also a 2-page pronunciation guide as well as the alphabet. His entries look very similar to Molino's, both linguistically and stylistically, although we come across long phrases as in:

soldati tutti ammazzati d'avanti, come accadè a quelli di Catelina ]  
Iughunde ep iengigierleri uldurdiler.

The text is 280 pages long, with some encyclopedic information added at the end such as Parts of the body (pages 281-284), Numbers, days and months (pages 285-287), Languages spoken in the Ottoman Empire (pages 287-288), Countries under Ottoman rule (pages 288-289), List of Ottoman Sultans (page 289) and the complete title of the sultan (page 290). The entries do not offer any grammatical information since there is a 38-page grammar included at the back.

**5.4 Meninski, Franz. 1680. *Linguarum Orientalium: Turcicae Arabicae Persicae*. Vienna: Tip. Iosephi Nobilis de Kurzböck.**

The most interesting fact about this monumental work is that it was printed in Vienna at the climax of the hostility between the Ottomans and Austrians. Meninski was born in 1623 and lived in a period of constant Turkish threat until he died in 1698. He also served as the official interpreter for oriental

languages at the royal court. Along with his 4-volume giant format dictionary came also a grammar of these three languages explained in Latin. It was different from the preceding three dictionaries not only in size but also in direction, in that it was from Turkish into Latin *ad usitatores etiam Italica*. The first volume covered the letters a and b in 660 pages, the second from ta to dal in 822 pages, the third from d to k in 1086 pages and the last from k to y in 1202 pages. The first volume also had a very detailed 163-page introduction to Arabic, Persian, Turkish and European languages.

Lexicographically, Meninski's *Linguarum Orientalium* offered everything in that each entry had all the information categories the user needed:

Entry in arabic script – entry written in Latin script (i.e. pronunciation) – origin – grammar – plural – (1) equivalent in Italian – (2) equivalent in Latin – antonym – illustrative examples in Latin and their translation in Italian – derivatives, compounds and idiomatic expressions all in the same nest rather than as separate entries.

## 6. Conclusion

Thanks to the close commercial and political contacts of the Venetian, Genoese and other Italian states with the Ottomans, much translation activity went on at the Ottoman Court which was handled by the so-called *Dragomanni*. In fact, we owe the publication of the first Italian-Turkish dictionaries, which began in the 17th century, to these interpreters. Among the 4 dictionaries that appeared between 1641 and 1680, only one was compiled by a Capuchine father, which contradicts the common belief that it was the monasteries where the main lexicographic practice took place. Since these four individual lexicographers were of different origin, background and affiliation, they also produced significantly different dictionaries from each other and the study of these contemporary works of the 17th century no doubt reveals valuable lexicographical and historical information.

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