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**Stereotyped expressions in early Turkish epic poetry.
Descriptions of battle commencement, preparing armies
for attack, withdrawal, and duels**

Abstract

Stereotyped expressions or clichés are the most characteristic features of early Ottoman Turkish epics. The aim of this paper is to discuss expressions which describe the commencement of battle, the preparing of an army for attack, the withdrawal from the battlefield and duels. Examples were chosen from well known epic works such as the *Battalname*, *Danişmendname*, *Varka ve Gülşah*, *Umur Paşa Destanı*.

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One of the most characteristic traits of the Turkish epics, both in classical literature, so-called *Divan* literature, and in folk and popular literature, are stereotyped expressions. Research studies and publications on the early Ottoman literature reserve little space for the analysis of style. Among the few works that deal to some extent with the phenomena connected with style one should mention editions of *Danişmendname*¹, *Işkname*², *Hurşidname*³. Editions of the earliest epic works, written between the 13th–15th century

¹ I. Mélikoff, *La Geste de Melik Dānişmend. Etude critique du Dānişmendnāme*, I–II, Paris 1960; W.S. Garbuzowa, *Skazaniye o Mielikie Daniszmiendie. Istoriko-filologiczeskoje issledowanije*, Moskwa 1959; Arif Ali, *Daniszmanendname. Księga czynów Melika Daniszmanda*. Translation from Turkish by Małgorzata Łabęcka-Koecherowa and Tadeusz Majda, PIW, Warszawa 1980.

² Mehmed, *Księga miłości*. Translated, edited and poetically supplemented by M. Łabęcka-Koecherowa, Ossolineum, Wrocław 1987.

³ H. Ayan, M. Şeyhoğlu, *Hurşid-nāme. İnceleme – Metin – Sözlük – Konu – Dizini*, Erzurum 1979.

provide a wealth of material for the study of stylistic devices of early Turkish epic poetry. In that period, a very specific artistic style was formed in Turkish Anatolian literature. It can be observed in the majority of literary works, functioning on all levels of language: lexis, syntax, rhythm, euphony, and intonation. The use of stylistic devices depended on the taste of the target audience belonging to a given social class, as well as on the aesthetic and ideological role of the literary work. Alongside the work's ideological functions, expressive and impressive functions were also of importance. Most early Ottoman narratives were transmitted orally, and so the form of language and stylistic devices were used so as to accommodate the needs of the genre. Set phrases, clichés, stereotyped expressions and idioms played an important role in Turkish epics. They create a stylistic convention valid and followed at that time.

In order to demonstrate the use of these stylistic devices, those relative to battle commencement, preparing armies for attack, withdrawal, and duels have been selected.

Battle commencement was usually signaled using the sounds of band instruments, such as kettledrums, trumpets and pipes:

- | | |
|----|--|
| VG | çalınur kus u nefir u karanay
They beat the drum, blow the pipe and the trumpet |
| VG | kus-i harbi vü nakare urdılar
They beat the drum of war and the kettledrum |
| UP | çalınur kus u nakare vü boru
çalınur kus u nakare vü nefir
they beat the drum, kettledrum and blow the trumpet
they beat the drum, kettledrum and fife |
| MD | ...derhal buyurdı kus a nakareler çaldılar, atlarına suvar olub
kale'i çevirdiler.
He instantly ordered the beating the drum and kettledrum, they
mounted the horses and surrounded the castle... |

Withdrawal was signaled by beating 'retirement' rhythms on drums and kettledrums. Especially these stereotyped expressions can be encountered in every narrative:

- | | |
|----|--|
| VG | tabl-i asayiş uruldu ol zaman
The drum for retirement was beaten |
| MD | çünkü gece oldu tabl-i asayiş uruldu
When the night came they beat the drum of retirement |
| MD | çünkü gece oldu iki çeri birbirinden ayrıldı...nakibler kus u nakara
urdılar
When the night came, the two armies separated... the
drummers beat the drum and kettledrum |
| MD | Nestor ile Kaytal can acısından asayiş kusını urdılar aramgâha
vardılar... |

Nestor and Kaytal, with a heavy heart ordered the beating of the drum for retirement and went to the place of repose...

- VG tabl-i asayış uruldu ol çeri
 girü döndi çadurına her biri
 The drum for retirement was beaten
 For the army to return to their proper tents

Cliches used to describe the appearance of an army or of a detachment commence with such elements as: the rising of a cloud which the wind divide in two, after which the banners appear:

- BG karşudan toz uyandı gün yüzi tutuldu, toz içinden bir alem
 çıkageldi...
 In front, a cloud of dust raised so that it covered the sun, and
 from the dust a detachment appeared...
- UP bir ulu toz kopdı karşı nagehan leşker erişdi bulara bikerem...
 In front, a great cloud of dust raised and suddenly a merciless
 army came near them...
- MD nagâh kâfir tarafından toz belürdi, yel toza tokundu, toz iki pare
 oldu, içinden alemler sancaklar peyda oldu...
 Suddenly a cloud arose, the cloud of dust was divided into two
 and the banners and flags appeared...
- MD nagâh Amasya canibinden toz kopdı, yel toz dokundu, toz iki
 pare oldu, iki alem çıkageldi...
 Suddenly from the direction of Amasya rose a cloud of dust,
 wind blew, the cloud of dust was divided into two, and two banners
 appeared...

The description of a duel is usually written in a stereotyped way, though it might be slightly varied. A warrior willing to confront his enemy comes forward from within the ranks, makes his horse rear, challenging his would-be enemy. This challenge is a proof of his strength and bravery. It is often accompanied by verbally assaulting the adversary with a wealth of insults and epithets. The duel or the delivery of a blow itself is preceded by a cry of war. Then the duelists confront each other in a ritualised way, using different kinds of arms. The final blow is usually described as strong enough to split the adversary in two, down to the very saddle and so on.

In Western Europe the practice of conforming to standard principles of combat was generally limited to Christians. Although the aim of a fight between fellow Christian knights was not killing, but rather defeating the opponent by throwing him off the saddle or capturing him for ransom, these rules did not apply to Pagans, usually referred to as Saracens (Muslims). A Pagan could be killed without remorse, this being considered a noble deed. Principles of combat were completely different in the Middle East, where dueling principles applied equally to Christians and Muslims. In the case of Christians, delivery

of the fatal blow was often preceded by a call to accept 'the true faith'. Only when the Christian refused to do so, was the blow executed. An excellent description of Melik Danishmend's fight with Artuhi the Christian and his subsequent conversion to Islam is provided in *Danışmendname* (*Book of Deeds of Melik Danishmend* X, p. 53–55). In the West, duels between knights were also staged during peacetime, during knight tournaments. They evolved into a sporting competition, and a spectacle. Two-opponent duels, as well as staging two-army battles, capturing cities and forts, have their counterparts in Turkey in the *şenliks*, also called festivals of arts and skills. It could be possible that several forms originating in the *şenliks* were incorporated into the formula of Western tournaments.

Calling adversary to face a challenge:

- MD at depdi meydana girdi er diledi
 He set spurs to the horse, entered the lists and called the adversary
- MD nagâh Efromiya meydana girdi turyad kıldı cevlan gösterdi er diledi
 Suddenly Efromiya entered the lists, made her horse spin
 and called the adversary
- VG iki yanadan nakare urdılar
 iki leşker karşu karşu turdılar
 On both sides they beat the drum
 the two armies stood opposite one another
 Varka diledi ki meydana gire
 bunlara erlük nicedür göstere
 Varka wanted to enter the battle field
 he wanted to show them what courage was
- BG Turan came forward first to confront Battal. He positioned himself
 for a duel opposite Seyyid and shouted: 'You sorcerer! So you
 have come back to life, have you?! I'm going to kill you in an
 instant!' With these words he aimed a blow at Seyyid. He parried
 the spear, Turan tried to draw back, but Seyyid grabbed his belt,
 pulled him down from his horse, ripped him apart like an old rag
 and split his body in half, after which he lifted him and threw the
 body forward. Now Kabus from Talekan approached, brandishing
 a sabre. And he too was split in half by Seyyid, who cut him with
 a sword from shoulders down to the chest. Tahamtan, Rustem's
 descendant, galloped onto the meydan. Several of his blows made
 no impact. Seyyid called him to accept the true faith, but when
 he noticed that Tahamtan did not succumb, he struck at him
 with the mace of the famous Sam. Tahamtan's shield could not
 withstand the blow.

(Based on the German translation by Hermann Ethé, *Die Fahrten des Sajjid Batthal. Ein alttürkischer Volks- und Sittenroman*, Leipzig 1871)

- BG Battāl Ğāzī meydāna girdi çağırdı “Aḥmer qanı? Meydāna gelsün ceng idelüm” didi. Ahmer dahı atına bindi meydān gözetdi... Elindeki sūñüyi havāle qıldı. Bu taraftan Seyyid qarşudan tāziyāne ile çarpı virdi sūñü pāre pāre oldı. Geldi kim geçe bir muşt gögsine eyle urdıkim iki ayağı üzengüden qopdı depesinün üstine mu'allāq yıqdı. (p. 375 A 41)

Battal entered the battelfield and shouted, “Where is Ahmar, let him come forth so we can have a duel”. Ahmar rode his horse and surveyed the battelfield... and hurled the lance he was holding. On this side, Sayyid whipped his whip from all the way across and broke it into pieces. Ahmar came over in order to pass but Battal punched him so hard that his feet slipped off the stirrup and he collapsed hanging on his head.

- MD ...sünü eline aldı Artuhiye hamle kıldı Artuhi men eyledi kılıcın gürzin dahı savdı...
He took a spear in his hand, attacked Artuhi, Artuhi parried his blow and he also parried the blows of sword and mace...
- MD kâfire bir zarb-ı tiğ şöyle urdı kim eyer kaşına degin iki pare kıldı (Melik) slashed the infidel with a sword so that he split him in two parts down to the saddle...
- VG Varka indürdi kılıcı üstine
ol süvarı iki bölmek kasdına
Varka brought down his sword on him
with the intention of splitting the horseman in two
- VG pehlevan kalkanını karşı virür
kuvvet ile Varka tiğın indürür
tiğ bürran idi kesdi kalkanı
farkına geçdi iki biçdi anı
The hero puts up his shield
powerfully Varka brings down his sword
the sword was sharp, it cut the shield
it passed through to his head, it split him in two

The description of a battle or a duel is often expressed by an appropriate choice of words, especially onomathopeic, as well as by accumulating words whose meanings intensify the action:

- MD Müsülmanlar el bir edüb kâfirlere hamle kıldılar şöyle kim başlar kesdiler, kanlar dökdiler (hamle kılmak, başlar kesmek, kanlar dökmek)
The Muslims closed their ranks, attacked the infidels with such a fury, that they cut many heads and shed a lot of blood

UP gök demür a'da çığış çığış eder
 iki leşker uğraşuban cenk eder
 dün ü gün cenk oldu üç gün sertaser
 Müslimanlar zari kılur kopdı şer
 (çığışmak, cenk etmek, uğraşmak, zari kılmak, şer kopmak)
 Steel armour of enemy cracked
 the two armies battled and fought
 the battle lasted three days and nights
 the Muslims raised cries and mad tumult

As it was shown by the examples selected, stereotyped expressions played an important role in old Ottoman epics. Though we are dealing with an established convention, there are numerous variations and new elements of the same image. It was therefore the aim of this paper to collect expressions and formulas on the subject of a battle and a duel. It would be very useful to extend the theme area in order to write an exhaustive study on stereotyped expressions.

Abbreviations

- BG = *Battalname*. Introduction, English Translation, Turkish Transcription, Commentary and Facsimile. Ed. Yorgos Dedes, Harvard University, 1996, vol. 1-3.
 MD = *La geste de Melik Danişmend. Étude critique du Danişmendname*. Ed. Irène Mélikoff, Paris 1960.
 VG = Yusuf-i Meddah, *Varqa ve Gülşah*. Ed. Grace Martin Smith, Leiden 1976.
 UP = *Le Destan d'Umur Pacha*. Ed. Irène Mélikoff-Sayar, Paris 1954.