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TURKIC LITERATURE – Postclassical Period

PART I: PRE-İSLAMİC TURKISH LİTERATURE

Overview. It is with the Orhon inscriptions of the eighth century A.D. that we get the most significant documents of early Turkish literature. Those inscriptions as well as the oral epics and a large body of oral lyric verse constitute the best work of the nomadic and settled Turkish communities until the latter part of the eleventh century. Among the oldest specimens of written literary works are memorial tablets, stone monoliths, and stelae found in the Yenisei Valley of northeastern Mongolia as well as documents unearthed in the Sinkiang region of modern China. Dating from the seventh to the ninth century,these works include stories of the battles the Turks fought against the Chinese, a variety of legends, and numerous specimens of verse (found mostly in Chinese translation) written in Uyghur Turkish.

Early Relıgıon. The early Turks had animistic and pagan forms of worship. Shamanism held sway in many communities. Most of the moral themes in pre-Islamic Turkish legends appear as metaphors which seek to contrast good and evil. The dominant view is anthropomorphic.

NONFICTION

Inscriptions. Literature, the premier genre of Turkish culture, had its dawn in Mongolia' s Orhon Valley, where in the 720s and 730s the Köktürks erected stelae featuring their historical narratives. These inscriptions still stand in situ. They relate the Köktürk experiences of conflict, defeat, and regained sovereignty, in moving terms, they emphasize the importance of cultural authenticity and of a quasi-national consciousness.

FICTION

Tales. The Dede Korkut tales (The Book of Dede Korkut), often characterized as "the Turkish national epic,"probably had their origins in the tenth century, although the epic took about another five centuries to make its transition from the oral tradition to its first written version. In addition to the early Dede Korkut tales, which recount the Turks' heroic exploits,the oral tradition produced a large body of legends and stories.

Dede Korkut Tales. The Book of Dede Korkut has been called the Iliad of the Turks. The similarities are too few and too inconsequential to warrant systematic comparison, but, like the Iliad, the stories of Dede Korkut represent and embody the epic élan of a nation's literary imagination. Constructed not as a monolithic work but as a series of interrelated legends, The Book of Dede Korkut relates in prose and verse the tribulations of the Oğuz, an ancestral nomadic Turkish tribe, in their migration from Central Asia to parts of the Middle East. The stories that make up the epic have collective authorship in the form in which they were transcribed, although originally they may have been the work of a single writer. Since its emergence, possibly in the tenth century, the epic has undergone much substantive and stylistic change as a part of living oral literature. A significant aspect of its evolution was the introduction of Islamic themes as the Turks gradually adopted Islam.

The Legend of Creation. This legend, perhaps the earliest of Turkish legends, traces the origin of the universe to a single creator, a god named Kara Han, who finds his inspiration in the appearance of White Mother's face emerging out of water. Kara Han's first creature is man, who attempts to soar higher than his creator. Man is therefore deprived of the power to fly and remains condemned to earthbound life. The devil is shown in the legend as stronger than man but powerless before God.

POETRY

Lyrics. Turkish poetry made its debut in the Uyghur diaclect presumably in the sixth century, it had become a living tradition. This tradition's principal achievement is folk poetry composed by minstrels and troubadours, who voiced in a spontaneous, sincere, and simple language the sensibilities, yearnings, social protests, and critical views of the uneducated classes. Utilizing Turkic verse forms and syllabic meters, often extemporized and sung to musical accompaniment and replete with assonances, alliterations, and inexact rhymes, folk poetry harped on the themes of love, heroism, the beauties of nature, and, at times, mysticism.

Early Turkish communities produced many poems for different social and ritual occasions. It was customary to chant poems at quasi-religious ceremonies held before the hunt (sığır) and at the festivities after the hunt (şölen). Poetry was a vital ingredient of the funerals and memorial services (yuğ) where elegies called sagu were recited. Poems of joy and love were featured on all festive occasions. The lyrics of the songs offered as part of communal entertainment represented a major segment of the poetic lore.

Prosody. In the pre-Islamic era, Turks composed their verses in indigenous quantitative meters, which were based on an identical number of syllables, with one or two caesurae to a line. The stanzaic form, usually in units of four lines, relied heavily on rhyming, the most frequent pattern being abab / cccb / dddb. In some of the early poems, rhymes appeared, not at the end of lines, but at the beginning.

Early Lyrıc Poetry. Some of the earliest specimens of verse attributed to Turks are available only in Chinese translation. These epigrammatic poems (possibly excerpts) reveal a refined and subtle poetic sense:

> Young girls are weaving cloth,
> I can't hear the sound of the loom,
> But I hear those girls breathing.

In Uyghur texts, we find many early verses, some attributed to individual poets, vidual poets, others anonymous, but many were accomplished practitioners of their art, as can be seen in the closing stanzas of Aprin Çor Tigin's "Love Poem":

> Gods of light, grant me this bliss
> Let my soft gentle darling and I
> Join our lives forever.
>
> Mighty angels, give us power
> So that my black-eyed sweetheart and I
> Can live and laugh together.

Epıcs. Although all but one of the long epics, the Oğuzname, failed to survive intact, the material, that has come down to the present in partial or fragmentary form charts the continuity of literary evolution while presenting a panorama of life and culture among the Turks before their conversion to Islam.

The early epics are usually poetically conceived depictions of gods and heroes. Among them we find a fairly elaborate cosmogony, mythic accounts of the emergence of the Turks, stories about preternatural phenomena, and many legends of victory and defeat, of migration and catastrophe. The epic literature evolved in the Uyghur period is a narration of the emergence of tribes, their peripatetic adventures, their fight for survival against natural disasters and hostile communities, of exodus and injustice, of brave deeds and social disintegration, of victory and enslavement. Epic literature evolved as a collective creative endeavor and was kept alive, with substantial changes over the centuries, by minstrels—often called ozans or sometimes bahşis—who, accompanying themselves on a stringed instrument commonly referred to as a kopuz, narrated stories and chanted poems.

The Ergenekon Epic. The Ergenekon epic, an extended version of the popular Bozkurt (Gray Wolf) legend, is a picaresque depiction of a major Turkish community that escapes extinction thanks to the

procreation and protection of its totem-god Gray Wolf. A tale of survival, Ergenekon culminates in the story of how the Turks, incarcerated in a death valley surrounded by mountains that give no passage, dig a tunnel through an ironclad mountain and escape from the valley with Gray Wolf's guidance.

Oguz Epic. The only long epic from this period that remain intact is the Oğuz epic, whose origin might conceivably go as far back as twenty centuries. It is an elaborate and lyrical description of superhuman and worldly episodes in the life of the legendary hero Oğuz. The focal themes are those of heroism and struggle for survival. In blending miracles with daily life, the epic utilizes the motifs of nature's power and beauty. Interspersed in it are lyric passages that are further proof that ancient Turkic verse, in substance and form, had by this early period attained an appreciable level of artistry.

PART II **: EARLY ISLAMIC TURKISH LITERATURE :** Central Asia (11th - 12th Centurıes)

Migratıon. The earliest identifiably Turkic groups of Central Asia were settled communities with a distinctive culture and oral literary tradition. Most of them became peripatetic tribes after leaving their homeland under the pressure of natural hardships (perhaps
droughts or floods) or marauding enemies. Some resettled in nearby regions, others moved on to the distant Far East or the Near East. The exodus brought them in contact with diverse cultures and communities from which they acquired tools and terms, concepts and concrete objects—thus indicating their receptivity to anything useful that would serve their purposes.

The individual and the conglomerate nomadic tribes migrating into Anatolia─engaging in combat on the way, intermingling with other people, carrying their values of survival and mobility─evolved into principalities, into small and major states until the end of the thirteenth century. They conquered Baghdad in 1055 and gained control of Anatolia in 1071 as a result of the victory at Manzikert against the emperor of Byzantium. The Turkish Selçuk state emerged with a high culture of its own─affluent, excelling in theology and the arts.

İslamization. Thus the Turkish migration that started around the sixth century A.D.—a migration into China, India, Persia, the Caucasus, and Asia Minor—brought with it a rich oral tradition. Between the ninth and early thirteenth centuries, a vast majority of the Turks who settled in Asia Minor accepted Islam as their faith. By the end of the eleventh century, much of Turkish literature, oral and written, had already acquired an Islamic flavor. This orientation, together with the influence of Arabic and Persian cultures, was to continue throughout Ottoman history.

It was not an accident of history that most of the fighting Turks of a millennium ago bypassed Judaism and Christianity, with which they had come into close contact in Asia Minor. Islam's appeal to them was manifold. In Geoffrey Lewis's words, "The demands which it makes are few; the rewards which it promises are great, particularly to those who die battling "in the Path of Allah." But what must have had even more weight with the Turks who came over to Islam in such numbers during the tenth century was the fact that acceptance of Islam automatically conferred citizen-rights in a vast and flourishing civilization." Once conversion to Islam became firmly entrenched, the Turks started serving the cause of Muslim domination and propaganda fide. As Julius Germanus has observed: "Islam and its martial spirit was one of the greatest motives in the uninterrupted success of the Turks. They had fought, as idolaters before, for the sake of rapine and glory, but the propagation of the faith gave a moral aim to their valor and enhanced their fighting quality." In time, Islam became so pervasive a force that the Ottomans ceased to consider themselves Turks, proudly identifying themselves as Muslims.

Kasgarlı Mahmut. Some fine accomplishments of early Turkish poetry have been preserved in the comprehensive survey of Turkic languages compiled under the title Divanü Lügâti't Türk by Kâşgarlı Mahmud in the late eleventh century. This first work of "national cultural consciousness" contains many lyrics of ove and sorrow, as well as of hero worship and lament:

> Is Alp Er Tunga dead and gone
> While the evil world lives on?
> Has time's vengeance begun?

Now hearts are torn to shreds.

In the Divanü Lügâti't Türk, Kâşgarlı Mahmud,whose birth one thousand years ago was celebrated in 2008, cited a probably apocryphal hadith (traditional saying attributed to Prophet Muhammad) conferring God's blessing on the Turks' military and political power: "God Almighty said: 'I have an army to which I gave the name Turk. I had the Turks settle in the East. Whenever a nation displeases me, I send the Turks against that nation.' " Mahmud also made the statement: "Learn Turkish, for Turkish sultans will rule for many years to come."

Yusuf Has. The writing of the Kutadgu Bilig by Yusuf Has Hâcib coincided almost exactly with that of the Divanü Lügâti't Türk. Yet these two works could not be more disparate in orientation: the Divan, although written mostly in Arabic, is quintessentially "Turkish", whereas the Kutadgu Bilig—a monumental philosophical treatise in verse (approximately 6,500 couplets), on government, justice, and ethics—reflects the author's assimilation of Islamic concepts, of Arabic and Persian culture, including its orthography, vocabulary, and prosody.

Elıte vs Folk Literature. The disparity was to become the gulf that divided Turkish literature well into the twentieth century—the gulf, namely, between poesia d'arte and poesia popolare, to use Benedetto Croce's two categories. The first embodies elite, learned, ornate, refined literature; the second represents spontaneous, indigenous, down-to-earth, unassuming oral literature. Poesia d'arte is almost always an urban phenomenon, whereas poesia popolare usually flourishes in the countryside. The former, as the name suggests, has a strong commitment to the principle of "art for art's sake," whereas the latter is preponderantly engagé or utilitarian in function and substance.

Central Asıa. In the two centuries prior to the establishment of the Ottoman state, while the process of Islamization gained momentum, the intellectual elite of the Turkish states produced Islamic treatises, poems, translations, and Koranic commentaries. In the second half of the twelfth century, the Divan-ı Hikmet (Poems of Wisdom) by Ahmet Yesevi, founder of a principal mystic sect, and the Atebet-ül Hakayık (The Threshold of Truths), a long poetic tract by Edib Ahmed about ways of achieving moral excellence, wielded wide religious and literary influence.

İsiamizatıon of Dede Korlut Tales. The Book of Dede Korkut, composed of twelve legends, narrates in prose and verse the adventures of the Oğuz Turks migrating from Central Asia to Asia Minor. These tales of heroism constitute the Turks' principal national epic, which invites comparison with the world's best epic literature. Although the martial spirit dominates The Book of Dede Korkut, it also has eloquent passages that express a yearning for peace and tranquillity:

If the black mountains lying out there were quite safe,
Then people would go there to live.
If the rivers whose waters flow bloody were safe,
They would all flood their banks for joy.
If black stallions were safe,
They would then sire colts,
If the camel were safe in the midst of the herd,
She would mother young camels there.
If the white sheep were safe in the fold,
She would bear there her lambs,
And if gallant princes were safe,
They would all be the fathers of sons.
(Translated by Faruk Sümer, Ahmet E. Uysal,

PART III : **Early Islamic Turkish Literature :** Selçuk Mystical Literature in Anatolia

Gazi vs Sufi. Turkish communities, through many centuries, experienced the duality of the gazi (warrior, conquering hero) and Sufi (mystic) spirits. Whereas the raiders and the soldiers of Islam kept waging war to expand the frontiers of the faith, the Sufis—men of peace, humanism, and love—preached the virtues of tranquillity in the heart and all over the world.

RUMI The mystic philosopher whose thoughts and spiritual guidance were to dominate Anatolia from the thirteenth century onward and inspire many nations in modern times was Mevlana Celaleddin Rumi (1207–73). With his poetic celebrations of love and the arts and life itself, he heralded in the thirteenth century a new glittering age of humanistic mysticism. His ideas─which stressed the deathlessness of the loving soul, the joys of passion, the inherent worth of the human being, the aesthetic and ecstatic imperative of faith, the need to go beyond the confines of scholasticism and to transcend schisms, and above all, the godliness of man─ not only gave renewed vigor to Islamic mysticism but also represented for the Islamic religion in general a counterpart of the Renaissance, which was to emerge in Europe a century after Rumi's death.

Early Life. Celaleddin was born in Balkh (in present-day Afghanistan) in 1207, the son of a renowned scholar and mystic, Bahaüddin Veled. When Celaleddin was about twelve years old, his family was forced to flee Balkh probably either because of an impending Mongol onslaught or the result of an intellectual-political disagreement between Bahaüddin and the sultan. The family wandered through Persia and the Arab lands for ten years without finding a city receptive to Bahaüddin's independent spirit and unorthodox ideas. Finally, the city of Konya welcomed them. Celaleddin was twenty-two years old when they arrived in Konya, which had been a Selçuk city for nearly 150 years. The capital of the Turkish Selçuk Empire, it was a center of high culture and enjoyed a climate of tolerance and freedom. Although predominantly Turkish and Muslim,Rumi's new home had a cosmopolitan population with Christian, Jewish, Greek, and Armenian communities. Islamic sects and non-Muslim communities coexisted and flourished. He lived there until his death on December 17, 1273, at the age of sixty-six. The cityafforded him the atmosphere and the opportunity to evolve and express his new ideas, which received cultural values from the diverse religions and sects active in the Selçuk capital. He achieved distinction as a young theologian and Sufi. It was in Konya that Rumi's philosophy engendered the Mevlevi movement or sect (which has come to be known in the West as "The Whirling Dervishes").

Creativity. In 1244, a dramatic encounter changed Mevlana's spiritual life. In Konya, he met a wild mystic who seemed to have come out of nowhere—Şems of Tabriz. It is said that Rumi discovered the inner secrets of love through Şem's influence and came to the realization that love transcends the mind. At this stage in his life, at age thirty-seven, he was above all a scholar. He had read in depth in Persian, Arabic, Turkish, Greek, and Hebrew, and commanded vast encyclopaedic knowledge. But now passion reigned supreme over his mind. The frontiers of the intellect suddenly appeared too narrow, constricting, claustrophobic. As a result of his affection, perhaps love, for Şems, he embarked on a period of virtually constant ecstasy and excitement, of poetic creativity, of immersion in music—and the sema, mystic whirling.

Synesthesia. The passions of the mystic mind which Mevlana called "my spiritual kingdom," intensified by his pains and ecstasies, gave rise to his collection of odes and quatrains entitled Divan-ı Kebir, and to the great Mesnevi, consisting of some twenty-six thousand couplets, which is a masterwork of poetic narration and Sufi wisdom. It is small wonder that the great mystic was given the supreme title of "Mevlana" (Our Lord, Grand Master). His reputation rests not only on the spiritual heights he attained in his poetry, but also on his having brought the dimension of aesthetics to mysticism in a systematic and comprehensive way. Poetry, music, dance, and the visual arts—rare in most Islamic movements—were integrally combined in the practices of the Mevlevi Order. Not only the synesthesia of the verbal, musical, and visual genres, but more comprehensively, the unified use of intellectual, spiritual, and artistic elements constituted the hallmark of Mevlana's faith.

Philosopher. Rumi may well be the only major philosopher in history, after Lucretius, to express and formulate an entire system of thought in poetic form. Taken together, his Mesnevi, Divan-ı Kebir, and

Rubaiyat represent perhaps the world's most resourceful synthesis of poetry and philosophy, conflating the lyric, narrative, epic, didactic, epigrammatic, satiric, and elegiac norms. They embody the aesthetics of ethics and metaphysics. His Mesnevi makes a monumental synthesis of mystic ideas ranging from Neoplatonism to Chinese thought, embracing Indian, Persian, and Greek mythology, stories from the holy books, as well as Arab and Persian legends and folk stories. Certainly, no mystic poet has surpassed him in the more than seven centuries since his death.

Mystic. The mystic's predicament is that he or she has temporarily fallen apart from God's reality and beauty. The divine image, God's human manifestation, yearns to return to the beloved Godhead. The mystic feels a sublime love that remains unrequited until he suffers so intensely in his spiritual exile that he finally reaches the blissful state of the submergence of his selfhood, the death of his ego.

The time of attainment is celebrated in one of Rumi's most rhapsodical rubais:

> This is such a day: the sun is dazzling twice as before
> A day beyond all days, unlike all others—say no more . . .
> Lovers, I have great news for you: from the heavens above
> This day of love brings songs and flowers in a downpour.

One of his most subtle rubais evokes the mystery of spiritual elevation beyond the proverbial spring. But only a unique soul is capable of it—a single branch among all the trees:

> This season is not the spring, it is some other season,
> The languid trances in the eyes have a different reason,
> And there is another cause for the way each single branch
> Dallies by itself while all the trees sway in unison.

For Rumi, love is the paramount component of mystic theology:

> The religion of love is apart from all religions;
> The lovers of God have no religion but God alone.

Rumi felt little respect for organized religion and stressed the primacy of internal faith and inner allegiance:

> I roamed the lands of Christendom from end to end
> Searching all over, but He was not on the Cross.
>
> I went into the temples where the Indians worship idols
> And the Magians chant prayers to fire—I found no trace of Him.
>
> Riding at full speed, I looked all over the Kaaba
> But He was not at that sanctuary for young and old.
>
> Then I gazed right into my own heart:
> There, I saw Him . . . He was there and nowhere else.

Peace, in Rumi's view, is a focal virtue to be nurtured and defended for the individual and the community. In his lifetime, he witnessed the ravages of the Mongol invasion and the Crusades. World peace was a supreme ideal for him. He stood against injustice and tyranny: "When weapons and ignorance come together, pharaohs arise to devastate the world with their cruelty," an observation that still holds true more than seven hundred years after his death. One of his most eloquent couplets proclaims:

> Whatever you think of war, I am far, far from it;
> Whatever you think of love, I am that, only that, all that

Rumi had a humanistic, universalist, humanitarian vision: “I am,” he declared, “a temple for all mankind.”

> Like a compass I stand firm with one leg on my faith
> And roam with the other leg all over the seventy-two nations.
>
> Seventy-two nations hear of their secrets from us:
> We are the reed whose song unites all nations and faiths.

Proclaiming that “my faith and my nation are God,” Rumi made a plea for universal brotherhood in a world torn asunder by conflicting ideologies, sectarian divisions, religious strife, and jingoistic nationalism. One of his universalist statements is remarkable for his time: “Hindus, Kipchaks, Anatolians, Ethiopians—they all lie peacefully in their graves, separately, yet the same color.” “The Sultan of Lovers” also wrote one of the most eloquent lines of ecumenism:

> In all mosques, temples, churches I find one shrine alone.

Rumi is included in this survey despite the fact that he composed his vast poetic corpus in Persian (except for a smattering of verses in Arabic, Turkish, and languages) because he lived and wrote in Konya in the heartland of Anatolia for almost two-thirds of his life and because his spirituality, mysticism, and poetics have exerted an encompassing and enduring impact on Turkish culture since the thirteenth century, starting with the prominent folk mystic poet Yunus Emre (d. ca. 1321).

By the late thirteenth century, Islamic mysticism, in particularly Rumi’s Sufi philosophy, had become influential in many parts of the new homeland of the Turks. After several centuries of turmoil in Anatolia—with the ravages of the Crusades, the Byzantine-Selçuk wars, the Mongol invasions, strife among various Anatolian states and principalities, and frequent secessionist uprisings still visible or continuing—there was a craving for peace based on an appreciation of man’s inherent worth. Mysticism, which attributes godlike qualities to man, became the apostle of peace and the chief defender of man’s value.

HACI BEKTAS VELI (Thirteenth Century)

An influential Anatolian mystic who formulated compelling ethical precepts, Hacı Bektaş Veli was the founder of the Bektaşi sect, which was to become the most popular of Anatolian sects. His teachings continue to inspire the people of Turkey.

- “If a road is not traveled with knowledge and science, it leads you to darkness.”
- “Never forget that your enemy, too, is human.”
- “Do not hurt even if you are hurt.”
- “If you sow a heart, you will reap a heart.”
- “If you want to live proud and brave, be just above all.”
- “How happy is he who holds a torch to darkness.”

YUNUS EMRE

The tradition of Turkish humanism is best represented by Yunus Emre. His poetry embodies the quintessence of Turkish-Anatolian-Islamic humanism. He was the most significant literary figure of Turkish Anatolia to assimilate the teachings of Islam and to forge a synthesis of Islam’s primary values and mystic folk poetry. Yunus Emre, the first great Turkish humanist, stood squarely against Muslim dogmatists in expressing the primary importance of human existence. He spoke out for human dignity and put forth an image of man not as an outcast, but as an extension of God’s reality and love:

> We love the created
> For the Creator’s sake.

He went in search of God's essence and, after sustained struggle and anguish, made his ultimate discovery:

> The Providence that casts this spell
> And speaks so many tongues to tell,
> Transcends the earth, heaven and hell,
> But is contained in this heart's cast.
>
> The yearning tormented my mind:
> I searched the heavens and the ground;
> I looked and looked, but failed to find.
> I found Him inside man at last.

Suffused through Yunus Emre's verses is the concept of love as the supreme attribute of man and God:

> When love arrives, all needs and flaws are gone.

He found in love a spiritual force that transcends the narrow confines into which human beings are forced:

> The man who feels the marvels of true love
> Abandons his religion and nation.

Naturalistic and ecumenical visions form an integral part of Yunus Emre's theology:

> With the mountains and rocks
> I call you out, my God;
> With the birds as day breaks
> I call you out, my God.
>
> With Jesus in the sky,
> Moses on Mount Sinai,
> Raising my scepter high,
> I call you out, my God.

His poems frequently refer to his full acceptance of the "four holy books" rather than a strict adherence to the Koran—the other three being the Old Testament, the New Testament, and the Talmud.

Many of Yunus Emre's fundamental concepts are steeped in the Sufi tradition, particularly as set forth by Rumi who utilized the legacy of Persia in cultural and linguistic terms. Like the medieval authors and thinkers in Europe who set aside their national languages in favor of Latin, Rumi chose Persian as his vehicle of expression. But Yunus Emre, like Dante, preferred the vernacular of his own people. Because he spoke their language and gave them the sense and the succor of divine love in such lines as "Whoever has one drop of love / Possesses God's existence," he became a legendary figure and a folk saint. In his lifetime, he traveled far and wide as a "dervish," not "colonizing" like many of his fellow dervishes, but letting his poetry serve the function of propaganda fide. For more than seven centuries, his verses have been memorized, recited, andcelebrated in the heartland of Anatolia. His fame has become so widespread that about a dozen towns claim to have his burial place.

Yunus Emre had a penchant for indigenous forms, used simple syllabic meters, and expressed his sentiments and the wisdom of his faith in the common man's language. Among his stylistic virtues are distilled statements, plain images and metaphors, and the avoidance of prolixity. He explicitly cautioned against loquaciousness and bloated language:

> Too many words are fit for a beast of burden.

Yunus Emre practiced aemulatio, free use of living tradition, whereas others often produced imitatio, servile copies of earlier verses. He was able to use the forms (in particularly the gazel), the prosody (the quantitative metric system called aruz), and the vocabulary of Arabic and Persian poetry. But most of his superior poems utilize the best resources of Turkish poetics, including the syllabic meters.
Yunus Emre's permanence and power emanate not merely from his language, but from his themes of timeless significance, from his universal concepts and concerns. He is very much a poet of today not only in Turkey, but around the world. We live in an age that articulates the dramatic contrast of love and hostility. War is renounced as the immediate evil and the ultimate crime against humanity. Love is recognized as the celebration of life. A mighty slogan of the 1960s and 1970s was "Make love, not war." This forceful statement is an echo from seven centuries ago, wherein we once again Yunus Emre, who expressed the same idea in a rhymed couplet:

I am not here on earth for strife,
Love is the mission of my life.

In his own age and down to the present, Yunus Emre has provided spiritual guidance and aesthetic enjoyment. His poetry is replete with universal verities and values and expresses the ecstasy of communion with nature and union with God. In his thought, the theme of union with God frequently appears as an incipient utopia. His humanism includes, in Hegel's words, the "urging of the spirit outward—that desire on the part of man to become acquainted with his world." Yunus Emre goes beyond this urge and aesthetically revels in the world's beauty.He expresses the typical humanistic joy of life:

This world is a young bride dressed in bright red and green;
Look on and on, you can't have enough of that bride.

Yunus Emre spurned book learning if it did not have humanistic relevance because he believed in man's godliness:

If you don't identify Man as God,
All your learning is of no use at all.

In this sense, he was akin to Petrarch, also a fourteenth-century poet, and to Erasmus, who, as a part of classical or Renaissance humanism a century later, shunned the dogmatism
imposed on man by scholasticism and tried to instill in the average man a rejuvenated sense of the importance of his life on earth. Similar to Dante's work, Yunus Emre's poetry symbolized the ethical patterns of mortal life while depicting the higher values of immortal being. Yunus Emre also offered to the common man "the optimism of mysticism"—the conviction that human beings, sharing godly attributes, are capable of transcending themselves:

The image of the Godhead is a mirror;
The man who looks sees his own face in there.

The central doctrine of Sufism is vahdet-i vücut, the unity of existence. Yunus Emre explicitly states this fundamental tenet:

The universe is the oneness of Deity,
The true man is he who knows this unity.

You had better seek Him in yourself,
You and He aren't apart—you're one.

"God's revelation in man" and "the human being as a true reflection of God's beautiful images" are recurrent themes in Yunus Emre's poems:

He is God Himself—human are His images.
See for yourself: God is man, that is what He is.

In an age when hostilities, rifts, and destruction were rampant, Yunus Emre was able to give expression to an all-embracing love of humanity and to his concepts of universal brotherhood that transcended all schisms and sects:

> For those who truly love God and His ways
> All the people of the world are brothers and sisters.

Humanism upholds the ideal of the total community of mankind. Yunus Emre's humanist credo is also based on international understanding that transcends ethnic, political, and sectarian divisions:

> The man who doesn't see the nations of the world as one
> Is a rebel even if the pious claim he's holy.

In a similar vein, Yunus declares his belief in virtue and unitarianism:

> Mystic is what they call me,
> Hate is my only enemy;
> I harbor a grudge against none.
> To me the whole wide world is one.

Yunus Emre's view of mysticism is closely allied with the concept that all human beings are born of God's love and that they are therefore equal and worthy of peace on earth. He decried religious intolerance and dwelt on the "unity of humanity":

> We regard no one's religion as contrary to ours,
> True love is born when all faiths are united as a whole.

In Yunus Emre's view, service to society is the ultimate moral ideal and the individual can find his own highest good in working for the benefit of all. His exhortations call for decent treatment of deprived people—"To look askance at the lowly is the wrong way"—and for social interdependence and charity:

> Toil, earn, eat, and give others your wages.
> — — —
> Hand out to others what you earn,
> Do the poor people a good turn.

He spoke out courageously against the oppression of underprivileged people by the rulers, landowners, wealthy men, officials, and religious leaders:

> Kindness of the lords ran its course,
> Now each one goes straddling a horse,
> They eat the flesh of the paupers,
> All they drink is the poor men's blood.

This humble mystic struck hard at the heartlessness of men in positions of power:

> The lords are wild with wealth and might,
> They ignore the poor people's plight;
> Immersed in selfhood which is blight,
> Their hearts are shorn of charity.

Yunus Emre also denigrated the pharisees' orthodox views and the strict teachings:

> The preachers who usurp the Prophet's place
> Inflict distress and pain on the populace.

He had no use for the trappings of organized religion:

True faith is in the head, not in the headgear.

— — —

A single visit into the heart is
Better than a hundred pilgrimages.

Claiming that the true believer “has no hope of Paradise nor fear of Hell,” the mystic poet is capable of taking even God himself to task:

You set a scale to weigh deeds, for your aim
Is to hurl me into Hell’s crackling flame.

You can see everything, you know me—fine;
Then, why must you weigh all these deeds of mine?

In poem after poem, he reminds the fanatics that love is supreme and stringent rules are futile:

Yunus Emre says to you, pharisee,
Make the holy pilgrimage if need be
A thousand times—but if you ask me,
The visit to a heart is best of all.

He warns that worship is not enough, all the ablutions and obeisances will not wash away the sin of maltreatment, offense, or exploitation committed against a good person:

If you break a true believer’s heart once,
It’s no prayer to God—this obeisance.

Like Mansur al-Hallaj (d. 922), one of the greatest Islamic Sufis of all time, who was put to death for proclaiming “Anal Haq” (I am God), Yunus Emre announces that he has achieved divinity:

Since the start of time I have been Mansur.
I have become God Almighty, brother.

He made a poetic plea for peace and the brotherhood of mankind—a plea for humanism that is still supremely relevant in today’s world convulsing with conflict and war:

Come, let us all be friends for once,
Let us make life easy on us,
Let us be lovers and loved ones,
The earth shall be left to no one.

Yunus Emre’s humanistic and aesthetic values, which were kept alive in Anatolia’s oral tradition, have had a powerful impact on Turkish culture since the early part of the twentieth century and appear likely to remain influential.

Talat S. Halman*, A Millennium of Turkish Literature: A Concise History,* ed. Jayne L. Warner, rev. ed. (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2011). First edition published by Republic of Turkey Ministry of Culture and Tourism, 2008.