TURKISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

Turkish belongs to the Altay branch of the Ural-Altay linguistic family. Through the span of history, Turks have spread over a wide geographical area, taking their language with them. Turkish speaking people have lived in a wide area stretching from today's Mongolia to the north coast of the Black Sea, the Balkans, East Europe, Anatolia, Iraq and a wide area of northern Africa. Due to the distances involved, various dialects and accents have emerged. The history of the language is divided into three main groups, old Turkish (from the 7th to the 13th centuries), mid-Turkish (from the 13th to the 20th) and new Turkish from the 20th century onwards. During the Ottoman Empire period Arabic and Persian words invaded the Turkish language and it consequently became mixed with three different languages. During the Ottoman period which spanned five centuries, the natural development of Turkish was severely hampered.

Then there was the "new language" movement. In 1928, five years after the proclamation of the Republic, the Arabic alphabet was replaced by the Latin one, which in turn speeded up the movement to rid the language of foreign words. The Turkish Language Institute was established in 1932 to carry out linguistic research and contribute to the natural development of the language. As a consequence of these efforts, modern Turkish is a literary and cultural language developing naturally and free of foreign influences.

The history of Turkish Literature may be divided into three periods, reflecting the history of Turkish civilization as follows: the period up to the adoption of Islam, the Islamic period and the period under western influence.

**Turkish Literature Prior to the Adoption of Islam**

Turkish literature was the joint product of the Turkish clans and was mostly oral. The oldest known examples of Turkish writings are on obelisks dating from the late 7th and early 8th centuries. The Orhun monumental inscriptions written in 720 for Tonyukuk, in 732 for Kültigin and in 735 for Bilge Kagan are masterpieces of Turkish literature with their subject matter and perfect style. Turkish epics dating from those times include the Yaratilis, Saka, Oguz-Kagan, Göktürk, Uyghur and Manas.

The "Book of Dede Korkut", put down in writing in the 14th century, is an extremely valuable work that preserves the memory of that epic era in beautiful language.

**Turkish Literature After the Adoption of Islam**

Following Turkish migrations into Anatolia in the wake of the Malazgirt victory in 1071, the establishment of various Beyliks in Anatolia and the eventual founding of the Seljuk and Ottoman Empires set the scene for Turkish literature to develop along two distinct lines, with "divan" or classical literature drawing its inspiration from the Arabic and Persian languages and Turkish folk literature still remaining deeply rooted in Central Asian traditions.

Divan poets did not have independent philosophies, they were content to express the same ideas in different ways. The magnificence of the poet came from his artistry in finding
original and beautiful forms of expression. The most famous of the Divan poets were Baki, Fuzuli, Nedim and Nef'i.

Initially based on two foreign literary traditions, Arab and Persian, literature gradually stopped being merely imitative and took on Ottoman national characteristics.

To a certain extent, the Turkish folk literature which has survived till our day, reflects the influence of Islam and the new life style and form of the traditional literature of Central Asia after the adoption of Islam. Turkish folk literature comprised anonymous works of bard poems and Tekke (mystical religious retreats) literature. Yunus Emre who lived in the second half of the 13th and early 14th centuries was an epoch making poet and sufî (mystical philosopher) expert in all three areas of folk literature as well as divan poetry. Important figures of poetic literature were Karacaoglan, Atik Ömer, Erzurumlu Emrah and Kayserili Seyrani.

**Influence of Western Literature on Turkish Literature**

Turkish Literature was influenced by the Western Literature. Changes in social, economic and political life were reflected in the literature of the time and the quest for change continued till the proclamation of the Republic. The distinguishing characteristic of the era in literature was the concern with intellectual content rather than esthetic values or perfection of style. The latest period in literature, which is known as the Turkish Literature of the Republican period, came to be influenced by the following literary schools after Divan literary styles had been abandoned: Tanzimat (reforms), Servet-i Fünun (scientific wealth), Fecr-i Ati (dawn of the new age) and Ulusal Edebiyat (national literature).

Leading figures in the first period (1860-1880) in Tanzimat literature were Sinasi, Ziya Pasa, Namik Kemal, and Ahmet Mithat Efendi. Leading figures during the second period (1880-1896) were Recaizade Mahmut Ekrem, Abdülhak Hamit, Sami Pasazade Sezai, and Nabizade Nazim.

Tevfik Fikret, Cenap Sahabettin, Süleyman Nazif, Halit Ziya Usakligil, Mehmet Rauf, Hüseyin Cahit Yalçın and Ahmet Hikmet Müftüoglu are the important representatives of this trend. Others who adopted the western approach, but who were outside the group, were Ahmet Rasim and Hüseyin Rahmi Gürpinar who supported the new Turkish literature.

The most interesting Fecr-i Ati poet was Ahmet Hasim. Yakup Kadri Karaosmanoglu and Refik Halit Karay who initially were in the Fecr-i Ati at the start of their careers, attained their true literary identities later in the National Literature Movement.

Mehmet Akif Ersoy and Yahya Kemal Beyatli initially followed independent courses and later joined the National Literature movement. The Tanzimat, Servet-i Fünun and Fecr-i Ati groups who came together to create a modern Turkish literature made great strides towards this aim, but their works stopped short of being a national literature with distinctive characteristics. In spirit, it was French-oriented, in language and style it was traditional and Ottoman.
National Literature was created between the years 1911 and 1923. The leading literary figures of the period were Ziya Gokalp, Ömer Seyfettin, Mehmet Emin Yurdakul, Yusuf Ziya Ortaç, Faruk Nafiz Camlibel, Enis Behiç Koryürek, Kemalertin Kamu, Aka Gündüz, Yakup Kadri Karaosmanoglu, Halide Edip Adıvar, Halit Karay, Resat Nuri Güntekin, Ahmet Hikmet Müftüoğlu, Necip Fazıl Kısakürek, Halide Nusret Zorlutuna, Sükufe Nihal, Peyami Safa, and Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar.

The Republic later encompassed practically all national literary figures in the fields of culture, ideology and literature. The first decade of the Republic bore the stamp of the National Literature movement, wherein the simple clear language, poetic forms and syllabic metre of folk literature and topics from Turkey were favoured.

The topics, written in simple language, were taken from real life and mirrored the conditions of the country. A unity was created in which all artists: Islamic, Ottoman, traditionalist and individualist could be a part, because the issue was not the concept of the trend of national literature, but the period itself of national literature.

Yahya Kemal Beyatli made his debut in 1912 and won fame during the War of Independence. Until the day he died he did not tire in his quest for pure poetry.

Mehmet Akif Ersoy, often considered an Islamic poet, made a great impact on both intellectuals and the masses with his book of poetry "Safahat" (stages) in which he treats the poverty and underdevelopment of various cities (primarily Istanbul) and countries and the alien aims of the intellectuals.

The first poets of the Republic used simple language and the syllabic metre. The advocates of the syllabic metre who won fame during the Truce Years were Orhan Seyfi Orhon, Yusuf Ziya Ortac, Faruk Nafiz Camlibel and Kemalettin Kamu, all poets who stressed themes from Anatolia and the lives of ordinary people in their poems.

Ahmet Hamdi Tanpinar wrote intensely profound poems full of hidden meaning, adapting Paul Valery's poetic notions to the Turkish language. Ahmet Kutsi Tecer was inspired in his work by folk sources, while Necip Fazıl Kısakürek expressed the mystic tendencies of the Anatolian people in his poems and plays, using the Turkish language skillfully in an original and modern style reflecting his colorful character. Nazım Hikmet Ran, who went to Russia when he was young and returned with Marxist-materialist convictions, wrote revolutionary poems using the esthetic qualities of Turkish in a new way which bore the influence of Myakovsky. These poems were the beginning of a socialist trend which became common in Turkish literature in the 1960's. By contrast, Ahmet Muhip Dranas' poems reflected esthetic considerations only. Arif Nihat Asya was original in the richness of spirit and style of his poems.

Ömer Seyfettin, the founder and most successful representative of the short story tradition in Turkish literature became the most widely-read author in the country when the 144th edition of his books was published. The writings of Sait Faik Abasıyanık and Sabahattin Ali started two widely different trends. Sait Faik Abasıyanık picked on happenings in Istanbul with
intense poetical feeling based on his own experiences. Sabahattin Ali, on the other hand, had a materialistic philosophy and specialized in objective description of simple events. With these two writers, daily life and events, opinions and expectations began to be reflected in literature, a trend that was to intensify in the 1960's.

Orhan Veli Kanik published his poems in a book entitled "Garip" in 1941, and two others who shared his style, Melih Cevdet Anday and Oktay Rifat, created a new poetic movement called "Garipçiler", based on the elimination of such formal restrictions as metre, rhyme and analogy hitherto considered to be essential in poetry. They wanted poetry to become a simple expression of feelings. Orhan Veli's successful poems in free verse greatly influenced those who came after him. Cahit Sitki Taranci achieved the same simplicity through the use of metre and rhyme. Free verse spread rapidly. Asaf Halet Çelebi, Fazil Hüsnü Daglarca and Behçet Necatigil were some of the successful representatives of this style.

The most well-known and widely-read writers of the 1950-1990 period can be listed as follows: Tarik Dursun K., Atilla İhan, Yasar Kemal, Orhan Kemal, Kemal Tahir, Tarik Bugra, Aziz Nesin, Mustafa Necati Sepetçioğlu, Firuzan, Adalet Agaoğlu, Sevgi Soysal, Tomris Uyar, Selim İleri, Cevat Sakir (Halikarnas Baliçisi), Necati Cumali, Haldun Taner. Prominent poets in this period are: Behçet Kemal Çağlar, Necati Cumali , Oktay Rifat, Melih Cevdet Anday, Cemal Süreya, Edip Cansever, Özdemir Ince, Atao Behramoğlu, İsmet Özel, Ece Ayhan, Turgut Uyar, Sezai Karakoç, Bahaettin Karakoç, Ümit Yasar Öguzcan, Orhan Pamuk.

Dervish Poetry

This is known as religious or mystical popular verse, and is a form of literature that emerged in the 11th and 12th centuries in which minstrels expressed their love of God and feelings about the hereafter. The most important exponents were Ahmet Yesevi, Yunus Emre, Hacı Bayram-ı Veli etc.

Varieties

1. İlahi: Poems which set out mystical views and ideas, divine wisdom and secrets, yet which bear no distinguishing signs of belonging to any particular religious sect, contenting themselves with praising God, His greatness and power. Generally written in quatrains or couplets. Quatrains tend to consist of 7, 8 and sometimes 11 syllables. Those in couplet form consist of 11, 14 or 16 syllables. These may also appear in prosodic form.

2. Nefes: İlahi verse written by Alawite-Bektaşi poets. Subject matter generally consists of the oneness of God, Alawite-Bektaşi principles or sect rules. Similar to koşma in form, they employ a very simple style of Turkish. They are written as quatrains of 7, 8 or 11 syllables, and some prosodic examples exist, although relatively few.

3. Ayin: Peculiar to mystics, and intended for the depiction of various states and movements. The term ayin was first employed by the Persians and then passed into Turkish mystical literature. The ayin was particularly used during assemblies at which dervishes performed their whirling dances.

5. Durak: Employed by most religious sects apart from the dervishes, these are free form poems particularly popular with the Halveti sect, and are recited by one or two readers after the reading of the first part of the holy names of Allah and before moving on to the second part.

6. Cumhur: Divine poems for group recitation in all but Dervish and Bektaşi communities.

7. Hikmet: Religious verse expressing the poet’s opinions and feelings.

8. Devriye: Poems from the religious popular verse tradition dealing with the cyclical theory. This is a reference to the way that man and the universe came from God and will return to Him.

9. Şathiye: poems from the religious tradition containing humorous elements. They express sect beliefs, are written and performed by mystical poets, and require an element of analysis to be understood.

10. Tevhid: Poems dealing with such elements as the essence of creation and the universe. May be seen in gazel, kaside and mesnevi form.

11. Nutuk: Didactic verse read by senior members of Dervish lodges.

12. Deme: Verse from the Alawite sect regarding the sect and its activities and dealing with its problems. Generally in eight-syllable form and accompanied by the saz.


AHMET YASEVI

Ahmet Yasevi (1093-1166) was born in the town of Sayram in western Turkistan and educated and lived in the towns of Yesi and Bukhara. He is the author of Divan-i Hikmet (Book of Wisdom). Although he knew Arabic and Persian languages, he wrote in Turkish. He followed the line of Ebu Hanife in terms of religion. He also strove to transform the system of “folk piety” which existed among Turks in villages as well as among nomads as a way of religious life into a model for Turkish Sufism. He was successful in merging ancient Turkish wisdom with Islamic concepts.

It may be argued that the “first Turkish Sufism line” is in fact a moral and scientific philosophy, which was present among Turkish people before Islam, which later reconciled the collective “Turkish wisdom” with Islamic elements. For this reason, it has characteristics, which contradicted with the perceptions of “Persian Sufism” which was starting to develop in that period. The first period of Turkish Sufism appears to have been easily understood as a moral system for a moral purpose, with concepts like devotion to one’s own country, repentance, renunciation and soul advice. In his explanations, Yeœevi gives examples from his own life and experiences. That he is simple and easily understood brought about the spread of
his views very quickly and he was accepted as a saint (veli) and became the one who was followed. Hence “Khorasan dervishes” who came to Anatolia from Central Asia took the views of Yesevi wherever they went and gave rise to the spread of Divan-i Hikmet in Anatolia. In this way it may be said that Ahmet Yasevi merged the Central Asian Turkish culture and Turkish way of life with Islamic elements and thus constituted a “Turkish-Islamic life model” and had these views spread throughout Anatolia and the Balkans via wandering dervishes.

MEVLANA CELALEDDIN RUMI (1207-1273)

Mevlana Celaleddin Rumi was an Anatolian holy man who gave hope and inspiration to humanity. He was born in 1207 in the city of Balkh, Horasan, present day in Afghanistan (or in the village of Wakhsh, present day in Tajikistan) and died in 1273 in Konya. He took his first lessons from his father Bahaeddin Veled, who was known as “sultan of scholars”. While he was studying Sufism he met Ahi Sems Tebrizi, and after this meeting his own ideas began to emerge. It is his poems about Sufism, however, for which he is chiefly remembered, respected and admired today.

The branch of love comes from ancient times, and its root from immortality,

That greatness is too much for this mind and morals,

Fade away, pass through your existence. Your existence is murder.

Love is nothing other than finding the truth.

According to Mevlana, love is the only thing necessary to attain God. A plant or an animal may also love, but it is only man who has the capacity to love with his body, mind, thoughts and memory. Mevlana exalts the state of being in love with a woman because if someone loves someone else, he also loves himself, humanity, the universe and God. The most beautiful love, “Love of Truth,” begins when someone reaches this level of wisdom. Followers of Mevlana (Melevi) spin around and around in a ritual called “sema.” This ritual symbolizes a world united in love and keeping step with the world’s universal rotation. While one of their hands points to the sky, the other hand points to the ground meaning “Love from God spreads to the earth”. The spirit bursts forth from God and is immortal. The sound of the nay (a reed flute) tells of man’s longing to return to his initial source.

He means that the universe is an endless place within the existence of God, and as a small part of the whole, man keeps that divine essence inside him by saying, “You who search for God, it’s you that you’re searching for....”

Come, no matter what you are,

Whether atheist or sun worshipper.

Whether you’ve backslid a thousand times,

Come, no matter what you are.
As we see, all mankind are brothers, and differences between religions do not square well with the divine presence. Mevlana attached great importance to women and maintains that men and women are equal, saying, “The more you insist women should cover themselves up, the more you incite people’s desire to see them.

Like a man, if a woman’s heart is good, she will chose the path of goodness independent of your prohibitory actions. If her heart is bad, you can’t influence whatever you do.” Mevlana’s students were called Kitap-el Esrar (Clerks of the Secret). They were composed of men and women from many different faiths, including Muslims, Christians, Jews, Iranians, Armenians, Rums and Turks. Mevlana’s students from different cultures and religions collected his poems and preserving them as a gift to later generations.

HACI BEKTASI VELI

Haji Bektashi Veli, united the Christian residents of Anatolia and Turkoman migrants with their educational and developmental activities and played an important role in the formation of cultural unity and central authority in Anatolia. Some holy men migrated to Anatolia, settled on mountains and empty crossroads and opened dervish lodges there. These institutions settled on empty land gradually became centers for culture, development and religious thought. In this manner, religious congregations spread everywhere, rules of morals, good breeding, attitudes and beliefs reached a high standard, knowledge and science were both produced and spread in these centers. The administration encouraged such holy men to settle in villages, and their educational activities gave them some privileges. As a result, even in the most desolate places in Anatolia, dervish lodges emerged, and with the effect of the education they provided, a common cultural structure began to form.

Haji Bektashi Veli was one of those figures who came to Anatolia from Khorasan with this purpose in mind. He was born in Nishabur, Khorasan in 1248, spent his childhood in Khorasan, and was trained in philosophy and social and positive sciences at Hodja Ahmed Yesevi’s school. After traveling to Iran, Iraq and Arabia, Haji Bektash settled in Sulucukarahoyuk in 1275/80.

At that time, Anatolia was under Mongol occupation, there was a severe social and economic crisis and fighting for political power. In that difficult climate, Haji Bektashi Veli settled in Sulucakarahoyuk, developed his philosophy and began to teach his students. His tolerance and human love based philosophy reached many people, and were taken up by them in the important center of Christianity of Cappadocia.

“There is no need to discriminate between religions. Religions cause disputes among people. In fact, all religions aim to provide peace and brotherhood on earth” says Bektashi Veli in his opus “Velayetname”. Bektashism, which originates from Haji Bektashi Veli’s ideas, aims to comprehend the unity of “Universe, God and Man” based on human love. Man is ornamented with divine characteristics. The first step to success is to know yourself and love yourself because man harbors divine qualities within himself, and the man who loves himself also loves God. This quatrain explains Bektashism’s understanding of love in the clearest way.
Man is independent. His duty is to behave modestly and to feed, refine, mature and fill his spirit with love of God. Bodies are only tools for the main purpose. So discriminating between men and women or classifying people according to their social status or race is a huge mistake. Man or woman, all of mankind is equal. Haji Bektashi Veli’s views are still alive today and celebrated with excitement every year on the 15-17th August in the Haji Bektash region of the province of Nevsehir.

Another institution that contributes to Anatolian culture unity is ahilik. (rules, manners, attitudes of people sharing same profession) Ahi, who came to Anatolia with the Yesevi dervishes, preferred cities to rural areas because they had professions. Ahilik (being an Ahi), is not only a professional organization but also a sacred institution with its own rules, traditions, conformities and secrets. Ahi Evran Veli was a holy man from Khorasan, like Haji Bektashi Veli, who united Anatolian Ahis and made them an organized force. Ahi Evran’s wife, Sister Fatima (known as Woman Mother) set up the first woman’s organization in the world, “Baciyan-ı Rum”. Ahis gathered in Ankara and Kirsehir under the sheik of Evran in the 13th century and spread to all Seljuk cities. Ahis played an important role in the formation of the Ottoman state, and to some researchers they even counted Osman Gazi, who founded the Ottoman state, his son Orhan Gazi and Sultan Murad I among their numbers.

Equality between members is the first Ahi rule. All members are brothers. On the other hand, the institution has many internal rules, and beginners have great respect for their elders. To become a member, one must be invited by an Ahi and people with bad reputations or who have dubious jobs can never be accepted. For example, murderers, people who kill animals (butchers) or people who have committed adultery are not allowed to be members. As with Bektashism, becoming a member is celebrated with a special ritual. In this ritual, the Ahi candidate wears a special belt (Sed) and members instruct him to treat everyone equally and honestly. Absolute affiliation and eternal obedience is expected from all members. Atheists and religious fanatics are not allowed to join. As with Bektashism, the Ahi goes through many stages in which he learns patience, purification of the soul, loyalty, friendship and tolerance.

In addition to these qualifications mentioned above, there are six important principles:

Open your hand (be generous to everyone),

Share your food,

Open the door of your house when somebody needs shelter,

Close your eyes (don’t be led astray by the artificial beauties of the world),

Control your waist (Don’t be a victim of your sexual impulses),

Control your tongue.

He who comes with patience and God,

Stands by our side.
He who works with morality and wisdom and passes us,
And stands our side.

There are many degrees in Ahism. In these, the student learns professional skills, Sufism and religion, reading and writing, Turkish, Arabic, Persian, music, mathematics and the Constitution of Ahi “Futuvvetname”

The nine degrees of the Ahi are:

Young fellow
Assistant
Apprentice
Experienced Apprentice
Master
Ahi
Caliph
Sheik
Grand Sheik

Although the Ahi institution has now weakened, it is still officially celebrated every year on the second Monday in October.

YUNUS EMRE

We know little about the life of Yunus Emre because the sources available to us are precious, scant and uncertain. Almost every significant thing about his life must be drawn from his poems.

The empire of the great Seljuk Turks, established in Khorassan by the mid-eleventh century, had already expanded its borders to the lands of Anatolia. The Byzantine empire which ruled Anatolia launched the Crusades to preserve its borders against the threat of these Seljuk Turks. The armies of the Crusades were defeated in their battles against them, and the Seljuk Turks established precedence over the Byzantines by conquering Anatolia. Yet shortly afterwards, the empire of the great Seljuk Turks collapsed as the Anatolian state of the Seljuk Turks was formed, while the Crusades still continued. And so not only did Anatolia itself fall into ruin from the ravages of war, but the Anatolian state of the Seljuk Turks was also seriously weakened in spite of their major victory over the armies of the Crusades.
The people of Anatolia, already weakened and devastated by the Crusades from the west, now fell victim to the plundering attacks of the Mongols from the east. In 1231 when the Mongols marched into the city of Sivas in central Anatolia, they embarked on the mass slaughter of the civilian population there. By the time the army of the Seljuk Turks arrived the Mongols had already withdrawn, disappearing into the rest of Anatolia. The direct consequence of these recurring Mongol raids on Anatolia was the splintering of its people, already weak and feeble, into many separate groups. Since the authority of the Anatolian Seljuk state was now so weak it had disintegrated politically, and since the army was incapable of protecting its citizens, individual communities gathered around a local ruler or beylik, a sultan.

This was the beginning of a process which strengthened a number of local rulers and sultans. On the one hand, local rulers, severely competitive, were fighting each other; at the same time they were also in revolt against the authority of the Seljuk state, while still struggling with the Mongol invasions. The picture we now see of Anatolia is sketched in by invasion, riot, the transition from nomadic to settled life for large groups of people, social disquiet and the instability of the Seljuk regime. We can say Anatolia was seething with unrest because of the Crusades, Mongol invasions, the revolt of local rulers and political quarrels for sovereignty among sultans.

This period of utmost unrest and turmoil shaped by all these difficulties which the people of Anatolia suffered, also shaped the remarkable character, the poetry and inner world of Yunus Emre. Through this terrible time, he spent his entire life trying to establish peace and unity in Anatolia, with both his ideas and his efforts. In pursuit of this, he traveled extensively among all the local rulers, explaining the significance of unity and peace to them: his great service was to give voice to and stimulate an awareness of these ideals in Anatolia.

There is consensus among historians and scholars that the Sakarya Valley is the place where Yunus Emre came into this world. Accordingly, Sarıköy – now called the village of Yunus Emre in the town of Mihalliççik, Eskisehir – has been acknowledged as the village where Yunus Emre was born.

During his youth when Yunus Emre lived with his mother in this village, he found himself in a kind of ghariblik, a strangeness, a sense of otherness which occasionally plunged him into loneliness. Most of the time, Yunus Emre wandered by himself through vineyards and orchards where he found himself in deep contemplation. One day as he was wandering alone again, he encountered “the sorrowful waterwheel.” While raising and lowering the waters of a stream to water vineyards and orchards, the waterwheel resonated as if it were weeping and moaning. He was overwhelmed by the effect of the waterwheel because its groaning actually voiced his own state of otherness, his solitude in this world.

In this way, Yunus Emre begun to pile up sorrow within himself for reasons which are unknown. The more his sorrow increased, the lonelier he became in a crowd. This loneliness, even among other people, was his sole friend; he was now the close friend of those who sorrow. In his village, if someone had sorrow and was in misery, Yunus would visit eagerly to share the sorrow, no matter who the person was. From that time on, everyone's sorrow, everyone's difficulty turned out to be Yunus Emre's own sorrow. He prayed to the Creator to
help those who found this strange affliction in themselves: with his prayers to God Yunus sought a remedy for their sorrow.

During a famine, he traveled to the dergah, the dervish lodge, of Hajji Bektash Veli, the great sultan of ma’na, of meaning, to ask for grain and seeds to feed his starving, hungry villagers. On the way to Hajji Bektash Veli, Yunus decided he could not arrive there with empty hands, and he picked some wild pears on the Anatolian steppes as a gift for Hajji Bektash. May God not oblige anyone to arrive with empty hands.

Hajji Bektash asked Yunus if he would accept a nefes, the secret breath of a blessing, instead of a cartful of grain sacks, but Yunus’ mind was on his villagers who were starving. Then Hajji Bektash increased his offer, “We will give you ten nefes for each wild pear you brought us.” Since Yunus had never heard of a nefes before, nor could he even imagine its extraordinary bliss, he chose the grain and seeds, and Hajji Bektash gave him the food instead.

Later, on his way back to the village, Yunus thought he had probably made a mistake as he began to realize the significance of the nefes Hajji Bektash had offered him. He rushed back to him and said, “Here is your grain, take it back and give me your nefes.” But Hajji Bektash told him his share of the nefes had been turned over to Taptuk Emre who would soon become his guide on the path. And so Yunus went to Taptuk Emre.

It took only a little time for Yunus to find Taptuk Emre, delivering himself with total love to his guide. Taptuk gave Yunus the duty of carrying wood from the forest to the dergah, the dervish lodge, and Yunus was a very conscientious pupil in his service there. This means he thought bent or curving pieces of wood were not worthy of the dergah, for which only straight pieces were acceptable. Whenever he returned from the forest Yunus was seen carrying unbent branches of wood to the dergah. However, this scrupulous concern for his duty caused a series of painful injuries to his back, of which Yunus said nothing.

Gharib Yunus, strange, secret Yunus, even though his back was covered with the wounds of these injuries, he still delivered the wood. Because the wounds hurt if he tried to unload one piece at a time, carefully, he would just fling it all to the ground at once. When they saw him do this, some of the dervishes who were envious of Yunus ran to Taptuk Emre and complained, “Yunus is already bored with service to you; now he is throwing the wood around and scattering what he brings to the dergah everywhere.”

Taptuk Emre replied, “Give him a beating! He has to give up this duty and be punished.” They went back to Yunus, beat him within an inch of his life then shoved him outside the gate. Now his body was almost out of the dergah, except for his head which was still inside.

Yunus whispered, “Al-hamdu lillah, all praise to Allah, my head is still inside.”

As soon as Taptuk heard what Yunus said, he rushed to embrace him with tears in his eyes, then he turned to the dervishes who had beaten Yunus and said angrily, “You tried to kill him, but I told you to beat him. Now I have heard what I wanted to hear.” Taptuk Emre himself cleansed Yunus’ wounds and healed them; he never had him fetch wood for the dergah again.
One day, when Taptuk presided over a gathering with his dervishes he turned to Yunus and said, “Recite your poems, my Yunus, recite your poems!” Yunus began to recite the words of the poems we know today. The envious dervishes, furious with this recognition, could not tolerate his presence in the dergah any longer, and they began to accuse him, to bring charges against him with never-ending intrigues. Offended by the plots against him, Yunus asked Taptuk for permission to leave, “I understand it is not easy to be a dervish; so let me go into the world with my solitude, my otherness, I will become an intimate friend of those who sorrow.”

Yunus traveled on foot, miles and miles through the steppes of Anatolia. There was a time during his travels when he realized the maturity of the state he had reached on the path. One day while he wandered the steppes of Anatolia, he encountered two traveling dervishes who invited him to accompany them. At the dusk of the first day, one of the dervishes prayed to God asking for food to eat: no sooner had he finished his prayer than a well-prepared dinner appeared. Yunus was amazed. On the second day at dinner time, the other dervish prayed and a meal just as good as the first one appeared. Yunus began to worry he might in his turn, be asked to produce a meal, and indeed, on the following day the two dervishes asked Yunus for his prayer to beg God for food. Yunus prayed silently, “O my God, I do not know such prayers, but I ask in the same name that my friends used in their prayer to You, please, may You not embarrass me.”

As soon as he finished his prayer, twice the amount of food they had eaten on the previous days appeared. The two dervishes were very surprised and asked Yunus, “In whose name did you pray to God?”

Yunus replied, “First, tell me in whose name you prayed.” They answered they had prayed in the name of a dervish called Yunus from Taptuk Emre's dergah.

After that, Yunus returned to Taptuk who gave him this explanation, “We would have delivered you to Haqq, to God, as a sealed chest, but you hurried away and opened your mouth. From this day on you will be the intimate friend of the gharibs, the strangers, the hidden beings, and those who sorrow. This is your path, go, do your duty!” And so Yunus traveled every square inch of the steppes of Anatolia on foot by day and by night. On his travels sometimes he would be a remedy for those who sorrowed, sometimes he would reconcile enemies, sometimes he would defend the rights of those who were treated unjustly, sometimes he would put local rulers and landowners to shame by asking them to act with justice.

As we observed before, the local rulers and sultans of Anatolia were fighting each other, there were mass killings, the Mongols were invading. In an age when battles, killing and destruction were rampant in Anatolia, Yunus, the volunteer for peace, traveled among the local rulers sowing the seeds of love, compassion and unity. In the same way, may God permit us to follow the same principles that Yunus did, may we have the determination and the intention to serve all without discrimination in this world today where unpleasant things are also happening.
During his lifetime Yunus did not claim to be a dervish nor did he describe himself as a sheikh or sultan. He was content with Haqq, the truth or reality which is God, losing any sense of self or varlik, individual existence, in the presence of Haqq. In this way he achieved the happiness of being yokluk, nothing, while at the same time becoming a source of hope for the gharibs, the hidden beings living in their otherness.

Yunus traveled to Syria and Azerbaijan as well as through Anatolia. Sarıköy, the place of his birth, is also the place where he died. Though several towns in Anatolia claim to possess Yunus’ mazar, his tomb, they are, in fact, his maqams, his spiritual stations in the world, places where he might have stopped to rest during his travels, where he might have visited people to discourse to them. The reverence for these places reveals how much the people of Anatolia valued Yunus, how they accepted and loved him. In fact, they appreciated and understood him well, aware that Yunus was truly close to them, and so they embraced him. He was, indeed, that friend who was conscious of their sorrows, their difficulties in life; he never separated himself from their reality. Furthermore, he was the only poet of his time who turned his face towards them, composing his poems in their spoken tongue. He implicitly explained the most complex, the most profound and perplexing truths to the people in their own language, making it easy for them to understand what he conveyed in his poems.

MUHAMMED FUZULI (1498-1556)

Fuzuli is one of the greatest Azeri-Turkish poets. His real name is Muhammed Süleyman Oğlu (poet’s name and patronymic) and it is generally believed that he was born around in 1495 or 1498 in Kerbela (in the area presently known as Iraq). We know almost nothing of the childhood and early youth of Fuzuli. He belonged to the Turkic tribe of Bayat, one of the Turcoman tribes that was scattered in all over the Middle East, Anatolia and the Caucasus from the 10th to 11th century and which has roots connected to the Azerbaijanian people. Although Fuzuli’s ancestors were of nomadic origin, his family had long been town-dwellers. At that time, the area where Fuzuli lived was a part of the Azerbaijani Safavid Dynasty (1501-1736) headed by the leader of the Turcoman Shiites, Shah Isma’il I (r. 1502-1524).

Fuzuli was a versatile and learned man and was both ambitious to possess these qualities and proud in possessing them. He composed poetry with equal facility and elegance in Turkish, Persian and Arabic. Although his Turkish works are written in Azeri dialect, he had a thorough knowledge of both Ottoman and Chagatai Turkish literary traditions. This trilingualism was not rare among the Turkic writers of the medieval period and is explainable by their cultural formulation, which was based, in fact, on Arabic religious and scientific tradition and on Persian literary tradition. In Fuzuli’s case, the use of the three languages was conditioned also by his particular environment because all three tongues were in use in Iraq, which as known from history was in 16th century, first a part of the Safavid State and later in 1534 became a part of the Ottoman Empire. Fuzuli wrote in Azeri Turkish since it was his mother tongue as well as for political circumstances. Shah Ism’ail I., who conquered Baghdad in 1508, has left us a divan in Azeri Turkish. After the Ottoman conquest of Baghdad, Turkish literature acquired even greater importance in this region.
The works for which Fuzuli is famous include his melodic and sensitive rendition of the classic "Layla and Majnun", which was written in Azeri-Turkish. This celebrated allegorical romance depicts the attraction of the Majnun (the human spirit) for Layla (divine beauty). Fuzuli is also the author of two divans (collection of poems), one in Azerbaijani Turkish, and the other in Persian. These anthologies contain examples of his most lyrical poetry, many concerned with mystical love and others lamenting the ephemeral nature of this world. His poetic expressions, characterized by sincerity, passion, and a pervading strain of melancholy, transcended the highly formalized classical Islamic literary esthetic. Fuzuli’s works influenced many poets up to the 19th century.