

# Why transcribe Ottoman Turkish texts?

by H.E. Boeschoten\*

Most editors of Ottoman texts consider a transcription in Latin characters an obligatory part of their philological work. According to Hazai<sup>1</sup>, they are minimally required:

- (a) to transcribe the texts, that is to take a position as far as the sound structure is concerned,
- (b) to translate the texts, that is to also take a position as far as the interpretation of the contents is concerned, and
- (c) to enable the reader to perform a check on the editor's work by publishing a facsimile of the original sources.

In this contribution I will try to show that Hazai's first requirement is ill-conceived. My arguments are partly based on matters of a principal nature, and are partly conclusions drawn during the work on the edition of a section of Evliyā Çelebi's *Seyāḥnâme*<sup>2</sup>.

This work is of considerable relevance for our topic for a number of reasons:

1) The archetype manuscript is far from fully vocalised, but a great number of vocalisations do occur scattered over the whole manuscript<sup>3</sup> in an apparently unsystematic way. The vocalised word-forms are not only infrequent items or toponyms, etc. Any form can occur vocalised in some passage or other. Because the work is so voluminous, a systematic study of the vocalisations will yield data on the vowel qualities of almost every form of the language employed by the author.

2) For his time, Evliyā Çelebi was an accomplished phonetician. This can be concluded from the samples of various languages contained in the *Seyāḥnâme*<sup>4</sup>.

3) In spelling as much as in style Evliyā Çelebi exhibits a rather non-conformist attitude<sup>5</sup>. It should be noted that this may partly be due to the fact that the archetype manuscript was still only a draft. However this may be, we can at least be assured that the text under consideration is orthographically less conventional than most 17th-century works.

One basic problem with Hazai's first requirement is that he does not specify what he means by 'sound structure' (*Lautstand*)<sup>6</sup>. Is he asking for a phonematization of the text, or should sub-phonological characteristics also be reflected in a transcription? In this connection it must be noted that so far all editors have offered some mixture of transcription and transliteration; for example, differences in spelling which

cannot possibly have phonological significance, most notably those occurring in Arabic loans, are reflected in all these transcriptions. It is often stressed that a 'correct' transcription must, *inter alia*, render a reconstruction of the original text in Arabic characters possible. This position may easily lead to the misunderstanding that the representation of what is *written* may cause problems for a transliteration. This is hardly the case, however. The real problems start where sounds, more especially vowels, are *not* indicated in the original text, i.e. are written defectively. It is precisely in these cases that the editor has to put his cards on the table: transliteration perforce becomes transcription.

The reconstruction of the sounds underlying a written text is to a large extent, implicitly or explicitly, dependent upon insights based on the analysis of external sources. We transcribe an occurrence *كلوب* in a 17th-century Ottoman text automatically as *gelüb*, and not *kelüb*, because the voiced *[g]* is univocally attested even for a much earlier period. But if we are to decide between *kendü* or *gendü*, for *کندو* we have to consider a lot of evidence. Is this word spelled with *kef-i Fārsī* somewhere in the manuscript? What conclusions can be drawn from other contemporary sources, such as the 'transcriptional documents'? Does the background of the author/scribe throw any light on the matter? We may even consider the possibility that we should transcribe *kendi*, if we want to offer a phonematized text, and find evidence that the form with *wāw* reflects a traditional ('archaic') spelling habit.

So, choices made for a transcription procedure are either based on external evidence, or reflect results obtained from an analysis of the text to be edited itself. Choices made by the editor which are based on the first type of evidence are mostly trivial, but in any case they are not directly connected with the text to be transcribed at all. Those of the second kind clearly rank among the linguistic results obtained by the editor. To my mind, an implicit presentation of such results as part of his transcription procedure must be considered unsatisfactory. Why not state them separately as research results?

Apart from these objections-in-principle against the supposed linguistic (*wissenschaftliche*) value of a transcription, new insights from the field of historical linguistics force us, I think, to adopt a somewhat different approach to the problem of variable spelling.

As I will explain, careful consideration of a number of cases to be found in the *Seyāhāt-nāme* can lead to the conclusion that a fully consistent transcription is impossible.

TABLE I

Variable spelling in Evliyā Çelebi's *Seyāhāt-nāme*  
(around 1680)

feature	instance	vol. place
şagîr nûn	1. a. <i>ne istersin</i> استرسین	III 79v,29
	b. <i>ne istersiñ</i> استرسک	V 150r,10
closed /é/	2. a. <i>dér</i> دیر	IV 209r,8
	b. <i>dérler</i> دیرلر	IV 215v,26
	c. <i>dérim</i> دیریم	IV 207v,25
	d. ??	passim
labial vowel-harmony	3. a. <i>olmüšdir</i> اولمشدیر	IV 227r,35
	b. <i>olmuşdur</i> اولمشدر	IV 231r,1
	c. ??	passim
	4. a. <i>vardir</i> واردیر	passim
	b. <i>dānedārdur</i> دانه داردر	IV 202r,30
	c. <i>köydür</i> کویدر	IV 192r,34
	d. <i>mumdir</i> مومدیر	V 112r,10
	e. ??	passim
	5. a. <i>kendüvi</i> کندوی	IV 194v,10
	b. <i>kendüvi-de</i> کندویده	IV 193v,11

In Table I instances of variable spelling are listed for a number of sounds in certain contexts. It is no accident that this type of variation is encountered precisely in the spelling of those elements in the phonological structure of Ottoman Turkish which were involved in a process of change during the 17th century: /ñ/ (*şagîr nûn*) was on its way to coincide with /n/, closed /é/ was disappearing<sup>7</sup> and labial vowel harmony was establishing itself for the forms listed in the table (the participle /mIş/, the copula suffix /dUr/ and the second syllable of the lexeme *kendü*). Recent sociolinguistic research has shown that we may believe what we see here<sup>8</sup>: a broad spectrum of phonetic realisations is to be expected for changing sounds. This means that there is no need to assume either the existence of intermediate sounds which are spelled either way, or the perseverance of 'archaic' spellings to explain this variation. On the contrary, at least for the examples cited in Table I, we would be on the wrong

track. Note that the same type of variation in spelling is reflected in the 17th-century transcriptional documents. A few examples from Jakab Nagy de Harsány's *Colloquia* are listed in Table II below<sup>9</sup>.

TABLE II

Variable spelling in Jakab Nagy de Harsány's *Colloquia Familiaria Turcica* (1672).

1. a. <i>verirüz</i>	(= <i>vérirüz</i> )	p. 61
b. <i>virirüm</i>	(= <i>vérirüm</i> )	p. 36
2. a. <i>eigse</i>	(= <i>eyice</i> )	p. 58
b. <i>ejügse</i>	(= <i>eyüce</i> )	p. 116
3. a. <i>oldikten ßonra</i>	(= <i>oldikten sonra</i> )	p. 54
b. <i>olduktan ßonra</i>	(= <i>olduktan sonra</i> )	p. 43

This situation results in a dilemma we cannot possibly resolve. For the linguistic reasons explained above, these forms cannot be normalised (e.g., phonematized). On the other hand, should we decide instead to stick to direct transcription instead, there is no way to decide what to do with the instances where these forms are written defectively in the original.

One final point can be made concerning the transcription of Arabic loanwords. Many instabilities in the phonetic realisations of these loans can still be encountered even today. Undoubtedly they originated from the special position of Arabic in the Ottoman Empire, and the high level of proficiency in this language obtained by many intellectuals. In practice, editors transcribe those loanwords according to normative patterns, for instance following the entries in Sir James W. Redhouse's dictionary or Meninski's *Thesaurus*. Forms marked as 'vulgar' by these authors, which actually often correspond already to Republican Turkish variants, are discarded. Now of course the term 'vulgar' is not used to indicate lower-class language use. Rather, those variants are marked with it, which threaten the established norm, precisely because they make their appearance in the speech of the educated. Therefore a normalised transcription procedure for Arabic loanwords is often a mere formality. For many items it cannot be claimed that the transcription chosen reflects the phonic representation which was *always*, or even *usually* employed by the author or scribe in his speech. On the other hand, in this case also the type of variation encountered in the 'transcriptional documents' makes it impossible to fix a standard for the *spoken* language of the educated in retrospect<sup>10</sup>.

The conclusion from all this must be that a transcription is a medium ill-suited for the presentation of

#### Illustration on p. 25:

A page from vol. IV of Evliyā Çelebi's *Seyāhāt-nāme* (ms. Topkapı Saray Library, fol. 287 verso).

Note the marginal addition at bottom left; additions like these occur throughout the archetype manuscript; the author was still using this version as a basis for editing work (in this particular instance the addition has been crossed out subsequently). Vocalisations which are relevant for the problems discussed in this paper are for instance: şıbyan-ı-nuñ (genitive -(n)uñ, line 6) düş-miş (line 1), çiq-dıqça (line 8), ek-dır-üp (line 20), taş-lıq (line 3).

قازنلریبان قیمنلری کجده بکیمینات اول کیمانه دوشیفده گیان قیمنوب اینهده ده دوشیش اسیسه اولی قیمنون  
 یول قیبلان و شاغز اولدو بپ بوستن اولر جمله خلقی بویاله کوشیفدی بیابا نیله کچنلر و بوداغلردا اقله قیلا  
 سگفله داغلارنده و قره طاشلیقده اولماکرات قدر قیلا نی اولور موصله من آشیغی بون قیلاک دَره سیر کماندن  
 التیزین عیقلانیا کراخانده لری و لاریه اما اصلاننده بریا طلی بوقدر صافیه خندقدمه باغچه لری یوقدر اما باغچه  
 غایت جوقدر ختی بزدوک قهر کمانرنده اولان چمنارستان اهره بجه بیکر سرآمد و قد قامت قوقاقنا جلر  
 وارکم هر یو بیوقدر سر حکمتدر حکمت شراب قماشتا بو قوم صیبا نلد جزائنه خیزر انکه قچان بود یا کجمله  
 اشیا رایتنه صوبیوز و مکده باشلدنده بو شهر صیبا نلری بری بره جمع اولوب هر قوقاقنا غاچنه صغیر  
 و کینیز بتمشتر و کسز و یوزیز مقدار غلاملر بو قوقاقده قلمشوب چقد قجه تاز زوره اعلا رینه  
 وارد قلدنده قوقاقنا غاچنه قیللی اولما یوب با ر قیبلانک هما غاچلر برتیکک یا نی کیم اکیلدوب ستر نکون  
 اولور کسز جمله جکر گوشه لر قوقاقنا غاچنک دل لرینه یا زره قوشوب کیم صا بر لوق قوقاقنا غاچنک او بر آسمانه  
 چتمش او جزا و غلاملر کز لایقیندن تا پیره دوشوب قیلر بو کره نازه سیده طفلانلر بیز بیز دال لردن  
 کتور لرن بیله آتاز لر بو کره قوقاقنا غاچنک یو کب خفیغیله آغاج اوزره لقا قرق الدیا و غلاملر اماره زدن لار  
 اولداریتا غاچنک دود و غنده قار بو کره اغاچر دپیره نوب قالمقا ایستراما زده اوزرینده غلاملر قوقاق  
 هار اوغزیه اغاچدن آغچراون عدد اوغلا کتور دیا آچده همان فقیر قوقاقنا بر تقیبلان خلاص اولوب  
 بر کره قرق البر عدد او شاق ایله کتور کتور بون قالمقوب تا او بر طر فده پیره اکیلدوب بری برتجه قدر  
 فقیر قوقاق کا صاغه و کا صوغه یا طوب قالمقوب صالنه صالنه بر قرار اولور اما بو عدله اغاچر ایکی  
 طره نه خیر اما نر خیر اما نر بو قدر غلاملر اوزرینده ایکن صالندجه طفلان ایچد خانلرک صوت خیزر لره ایله  
 بو کونده خاننده کلکری واردر کتص صیان خاننده کمان اغاچر صاغر طرفه صالیزکن جمله بر ایغزورن کلکری صون  
 خالی صون دوز فریاد ایوب شفا ایدره قچانکم اغاچر صول طرفه اکیلدوب و رره صون قهره رورن دوز آغازه ایدرلر  
 تا که اغاچر فقیرینه بر قرار دودر بو کره دمن اغاچده باله جیقوب اغاچس آشیغی اکیلدوب آشیغی  
 پیره اینلرینه اغاچده عنکوت کبوتر طر مشوب یینه اغاچر بار تقیبلان زمینه اکیلدوب بیلر بو کره دمن اغاچر  
 اوزره قالمق صالنا نلر کجمله صیبا نلر بو قوقاق دمن آشیغی اکیلدوب اغاچر اوزره قالمق اولدند خالی صون  
 چاغر برکم صداری با فلاک جقاره اگر بر خوش صالنه سه لر آشیغی کیلر اغاچده کیلرله هیز بظا بنو بظا بنو  
 هو کونن بظا بنو دیوب ان اوزوب بر لرینه بو کونده شقالر ایدرلر اما غرابت بونده در کم بریارده قوقاق  
 اغاچلری ایکی طرفه بریده اکلک احتما لری قیدر بقر بوم جمله صیان بعدال عمر خواجه لر نین اولدولنده  
 بویله اغاچلر اوزره اینلر لریک تما تا کا هدر اما اغاچلیغی قهر شید زه ره داز غلاملر عیبار بر سنکستان و جزیره زمین  
 اولما غیباله بیز کوی بو سر حده غلاملرینه اینلر دوز مثلر زیر او مشوره الحاق برجامه و بر حید و مسافرین اچون  
 بر خان واردر غیره اتر بنا دن بر حام و بر جاز سوی با زار اصلا بوقدره اما ییلارنده قیونلری جوققلر لکن شهر جلبد  
 ایشر با تا هر کیکله قزلباش مو قومک قرق بیک عدد قیونلر اولر سور نیب اول قیون ماد کچون کفیله مامور  
 اولدوغزینیا نیشو قوی بولدر بر کم بکونر قوی بیزه اکرام ایوب خن کدر اغاچلر حایه صنده مکش اتیق زوق صفا  
 اندک آب هواسی غایت لطیفدر احوال قوی بیا نش مشقه تا تخنده سلطان میلان خانده اطاعت ایوبینه  
 کتور لاند نیکت با ب عسلا تار یله او جاق بکر اولمشله خاک با کلرنده تیموز عیلت بوقدر طبل علم صا جویس  
 مکرمه جمله آتیک آد مه مالکده بینه بولدره محمدی عد او شور اما القابلرنده امر اعزینیا نیشو قوی بولدر  
 عاقلر کوزنده صا د قلق اوزنده شمشیر بلنده خنر اننده آتش باره اکلر بیز و غایت عفا لرد و حیدله و قصه  
 بریلر بولدر بولدر بولدره وانن کلن یوزنر آد ملری لالی و سافنر آد ملریله اجانبجه روانه اولوب جانیشور  
 ماعده منزل ریا جوق سلطانمرا د خان هانن عورت استکنده بوعالده مکش ایوب صالا او طایفه بیزه بر صغه وار

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linguistic results. Hazai's first requirement has to be rejected for reasons both of principle and of practice. A facsimile edition accompanied by a translation is quite acceptable in general, although it is conceded that the situation has to be assessed differently if no

archetype, or at least superior, manuscript is available. If a text yields data which throw light on the phonology or phonetics underlying it, the editor should discuss them in his introduction<sup>11</sup>.

## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Hazai's literal text is this:

(a) die Texte zu transkribieren, das heißt, eine Stellungnahme in bezug auf den Lautstand zu liefern;

(b) die Texte zu übersetzen, das heißt, auch eine Stellungnahme in bezug auf die inhaltlichen Zusammenhänge abzugeben;

(c) durch die Veröffentlichung der Faksimiles der Quellen eine Kontrolle zu ermöglichen.'

G. Hazai, *Kurze Einführung in das Studium der türkischen Sprache*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz (1978), p. 38.

<sup>2</sup> M. van Bruinessen & H. Boeschoten (eds.), *Evliya Çelebi in Diyarbekir*. Leiden: Brill (in the press).

<sup>3</sup> The *Seyāhāt-nāme* consists of ten volumes. The archetype of volumes 9 and 10 is lost. In volumes 7 and 8 vocalisations are very scarce. Even diacritical dots and lines are mostly lacking. Volume 6 was in much the same shape, but there diacritics have been added subsequently with a different type of ink. For details on the archetype MS, cf. P.A. Mackay, 'The Manuscripts of the *Seyahatname* of Evliya Çelebi' in: *Der Islam* 52 (1975), pp. 278-298, and R.F. Kreutel, 'Neues zur Evliya Çelebi Forschung' in: *Der Islam* 48 (1972), pp. 269-298.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Van Bruinessen & Boeschoten, *op. cit.*, Introd. Ch. IX. f., and references.

<sup>5</sup> This is the reason why E. Prokosch uses him as a main source for his *Studien zur Grammatik des Osmanisch-Türkischen*. Freiburg i.Br.: Klaus Schwarz (1980). The term *Vulgärosmanisch* in this context may be misleading. It is applied in the sense in which Evliya's contemporary Meninski already uses *vulgaris* in his *Thesaurus linguarum orientalium* (1680), approximately in the meaning of 'non-

standard'. For details on Evliya Çelebi's spelling, cf. Van Bruinessen & Boeschoten, *op. cit.*, Introd. Ch. VIII. d. and references, and R. Dankoff, *Evliya Çelebi in Bitlis*. Leiden: Brill (in the press).

<sup>6</sup> To simplify matters, I will in the following restrict the discussion to diplomatic editing work. Collation, of course, will create problems of its own for the transcription procedure.

<sup>7</sup> Dankoff, *op. cit.*, points out that the variable spelling of /é/ may actually be connected with the existence of different allophones in closed and open syllables.

<sup>8</sup> See Van Bruinessen & Boeschoten, *op. cit.*, Ch. IX, for details and references.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. the edition in G. Hazai, *Das Osmanisch-Türkische im 17. Jahrhundert*. Budapest: Ak. Kiadó (1973).

<sup>10</sup> In order to become convinced of the impossibility of achieving this, one has only to consult a few entries of S. Stachowski, *Studien über die arabischen Lehnwörter im Osmanisch-Türkischen*. Wrocław etc.: Wydawnictwo Pol. Ak. Nauk (1975-1981), 3 vols.

<sup>11</sup> One non-technical argument is often put forward in favour of the transcription praxis. One of the purposes the transcription of Ottoman Turkish texts serves, it is said, is to put them within the reach of the contemporary Turkish public. This argument does not impress me. If a person takes the trouble to acquire the lexical knowledge he needs for the understanding of High-Ottoman prose, he would be well advised to learn the Arabic alphabet — and the system of its application to Turkish — as well. After all, he can expect the latter effort to be infinitely smaller than the former.