

THE TWO MOST IMPORTANT CONTRIBUTIONS OF DR. GYULA MÉSZÁROS TO THE TURKISH FOLKLORE STUDIES

Dr. Gyula Mészáros'un Türk Halkbilimi Çalışmalarına En Önemli İki Katkısı

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Öz

19. ve 20. yüzyıllarda yaşamış ünlü Macar halkbilimcisi Dr. Gyula Mészáros'un Türk Halkbilimi çalışmalarına kanaatimizce yaptığı en önemli iki katkısı ve bunların zaman içindeki etkileri ele alınmaktadır. Dr. Gyula Mészáros'un Türk halkbilimine yaptığı en önemli iki katkısından ilki onun Türk Halkbilgisi Derneği'nin kuruluşunda oynadığı roldür. İkincisi ve pek çok yönden özellikle de etkileri bakımından daha da önemli katkısı "Türk Etnografya Müzesi"nin kuruluşudur. Çalışmamızda Dr. Gyula Mészáros'un Türk Halkbilimi çalışmalarına bu iki önemli katkısı ve onların tesirleri ele alınmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Turkish folklore studies, Dr. Gyula Mészáros, Türk Etnografya Müzesi, Türk Halkbilgisi Derneği.

Introduction

The subject of our study is the two most important contributions of the famous Hungarian folklorist Dr. Gyula Mészáros to Turkish Folklore and their influences. It would be useful to summarize the context of the emergence of Turkish folklore studies, albeit in outline, in order to reveal the subject better. As

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it is widely known, the Ottoman Empire produced three different policies to protect itself and its integrity from the destructive and divisive effects of nationalist movements aimed at establishing a “nation state” that became widespread after the French Revolution during the 19th century.

The first of these is Ottomanism. Ottomanism is the idea of “Ottomanism” based on land in a constitutional order that treats religions and ethnicities within the state as “free and equal citizens of the Ottoman country” and the policies aimed at creating it. As a result of the direct and indirect support of Christian nations and ethnicities by states such as Austria-Hungary, England and especially Russia, the successive independence of Christian elements such as Greece and Serbia and their separation from the Ottoman Empire reveals the failure of this policy and it is abandoned. Although the Islamism policy, which aimed to keep Muslim nations and ethnicities together in the Ottoman Empire, was implemented for almost half a century, the ideas of independence and the efforts to establish nation states between Arabs and Albanians will reveal the failure of this policy. The third and final policy is the Turkism ideology of Turks, who are the main factor establishing this multinational state, to establish their own nation-state. Turkish folklore studies, which were not put forward until the implementation of this ideology and policy, would emerge in this process from 1913 and spread rapidly. The contributions of Dr. Gyula Mészáros to Turkish Folklore are precisely mentioned in this context.

Dr. Gyula Mészáros made many contributions to Turkish folklore studies, as well as other aspects of Turkology and scholarship about Turkish culture¹. This work, however, will

¹ Dr. Mészáros was one of founders of the Turkish Society’s branch of the Ottoman Literature Society (Türk Derneği Edebiyat-ı Osmaniye Cemiyeti) in 1911 in Budapest; he also founded the Hungarian-Turkish Friendship Society (Macar-Türk Dostluk Derneği) in 1917 (Önen: 91). Additionally, Dr. Mészáros was a very active member of the Committee of Language (Dil Heyeti) which later became the “Turkish Institution of Language” (Türk Dil Kurumu) and the Committee of History which became the “Turkish Institution

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focus upon only two of his most important contributions, which actually are interwoven in many ways: First, his role in establishing *The Folklore Society* (Halkbilgisi Derneği) and second, his stature as the founder of The Turkish Museum of Ethnography (Türk Etnografya Müzesi).

Before discussing his work, it would be useful to give a few details of his life: He was born on 28.3.1883 in Szakcs and died on 25.05.1957, in New York City. He studied under Armin Vambery, doing fieldwork among the Chuvashes and İdil-Ural Turks (Kazan Tatars). His doctoral dissertation (1909) is about Turk-Tatar languages. He worked 14 years at the Hungarian Museum of Ethnology, and was chairperson of the Hungarology Department, Istanbul University (Dar'ülfünun) between 1906-1919. He was a poet, Turkologist, Hungarologist, ethnologist and museum curator².

Moreover - as a pupil Armin Vambery - Dr. Gyula Mészáros was one of the founders of the Hungarian Turan Society³. He was not only highly professional with his work in Turkey but also a man of high character inwardly moved by a sincere belief that Turan ideology worked, living as a true and faithful Turanist during the Otoman and Modern eras of Turkey. In this context, the relationship between folklore and nationalism is a well-known and well-documented issue within folklore scholarship. Nonetheless, the relationship between folklore and Turanistic internationalism seems to have been understudied, and Dr. Meszaros provides us with a living inspiration to explore these relationships in much greater depth.

To give some insight into Dr. Mészáros' contributions, *The Folklore Society* was established on 1 November 1927 in

of History” (Türk Tarih Kurumu) (Çoker 1983: 3-5; Türk Dil Kurumu'nun 40 Yılı 1972: 38-41).

² Dr. Mészáros bibliographical information compiled by Karaduman 2006 and Kiss Tamas (1994: 1362) was translated into Turkish for Karaduman by Dr. İsmail Doğan.

³ Dr. Mészáros twice did fieldwork in Turkey and collected material for the Hungarian National Museum, a project organised by the Turan Society (Önen 2005: 62).

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Ankara. Most Turkish sources listing its founders' names do not include his⁴. Once it was founded, however, The Society held its first official meeting on 18 March 1928 in Ankara, electing Dr. Mészáros as a member of a five-person committee (Düzgün 1997: 113) preparing the first *Turkish Folklore Manual* for fieldworkers “Halk Bilgisi Toplayıcılarına Rehber” (1928a; 1928b), and which was printed twice that year. Essentially, the manual was the work of Dr. Meszaros and Hamit Zübeyr who was also educated in Hungary. Moreover, this book is the scholarship foundation of scientific methodology in Turkish folklore studies for fieldworkers. Although changes in the Turkish alphabet took place only two years following its publication, the manual long served as a guide for fieldworkers and was referenced by other fieldwork guide books. Within a few years, as well, *The Folklore Society* established branches in İstanbul, Antalya, Balıkesir, Bursa, Erzurum, Gaziantep, Isparta and İzmir, with these outreaches serving as Turkish folklore training centers. Additionally, the Society published “The Folklore Journal” (Halkbilgisi Mecmuası), with its name later being changed to “Folklore News” (Halkbilgisi Haberleri / 1929-1947), and through 125 issues served as the flagship periodical of folklore in the nation until 1947.

Further, in regard to The Society, Halil Bedi, his friend and one of the earliest Turkish folklorists, wrote about Dr. Mészáros as a leader of its founding: “...in 1926 I was introduced by Professor İsmail Hakkı, to Dr. Gyula Meszaros, manager of the Museum of Turkish Ethnography, which was located just behind the Suleymaniye Mosque. I told him about my fieldwork and the data I was collecting, finally mentioning the need for a society which would allow Turkish folklorists to collaborate in working for Turkish folklore. He stood, shook my hand and said, ‘Now, at this moment, the folklore society is established’. That day, we planned The Society and its program, with scholars such as Hamit Zübeyr, Halil Vedat, Hilmi Ziya, Baha Sait and others later joining us. We petitioned Gazi Mustafa Kemal, President

⁴ For example, see Örnek (1977), Evliyaoğlu (1988).

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of Turkey, to serve as the society's honorary president, giving the petition to Yusuf Akçoraoglu, a close associate of Mustafa Kemal, before I went abroad to study. Two years later, *The Folklore Society* was officially established" (Yönetken 1969: 2197).

It is therefore clear that Dr. Mészáros was one of the founding fathers of Turkish folklore studies in modern Turkey, and anyone unfamiliar with his earlier work during the Ottoman Empire might be surprised by the scope and power of his scholarship and influence. As has been mentioned, he traveled to Turkey many times during the Ottoman period, as well as served as the chairperson of the Hungarology Department of Istanbul University where, besides Hungarian language and literature, he taught ethnology. Many of his colleagues from Istanbul University became founders of the Turkish Republic, such as Ziya Gökalp and Hamdullah Suphi, that being a reason why, when the Republic decided to establish a folk museum in 1924, the state asked to him to prepare a report about the feasibility of founding a Turkish Ethnography Museum. Only one day after completing it, on 30.11.1924, he was signed to a state contract as a founder of the museum, publishing three more feasibility reports the following year⁵. In these, he detailed the museum's necessities, i. e., equipment and the architecture of its buildings, following completion of the reports by starting to collect folklore and traditional works. The museum temporarily opened in the Medrese of Suleymaniye in İstanbul, with him as its manager; in 1930 he was also assigned as specialist at the Ankara Ethnography Museum (present-day Türk Etnografya Müzesi). It was built according to his specifications (Karaduman 2006), and he worked there until 1932 when he returned to Budapest. As Hüseyin Karaduman (2006) states "Dr. Mészáros was in a position such that he always enlightened his surroundings" and helped the nation fill

⁵ For more information about these reports, with their signature being Jul Mesaroş, see Mészáros (1924), Karaduman (2006).

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the gap between the West and Turkey by using his intellectual skills, knowledge and wisdom.⁶

To fully grasp his importance, in conclusion, let it be remembered that in 1913 / 14, three scholarly articles⁷ introduced the word and idea of “folklore” to the Turkish nation, which then endured World War I, The War of Independence and a period of turmoil until 1922 – with a ethnography museum, a folklore society, scholarly journal, a fieldwork manual and training centers being established by 1924, the period of remarkable fecundity under Dr. Gyula Meszaros’ guidance.

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⁶ Dr. Meszaros authored and published articles about the modernization of Turkey; for example, see Meszaros (1928).

⁷ For more about the articles that introduced folklore in Turkey, see Ziya Gökalp (1913); Rıza Tevfik (1914); Fuad Köprülü (1914).

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