

## Art of Book Illustration in Lithographies of Turkish Folk Narratives

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**Abstract:** Turkish folk narrative form called *hikâye* (*hikayat*) is the special genre of Turkish folk literature that has been existing for a long time mainly in the South of Turkey and in the Eastern Turkey since the Middle Ages. *Hikâye* is a prose text that includes folk songs and verses, that can be transmitted orally by story-tellers. The main peculiarity of this genre is its existence both in oral and written traditions at the same time. Those texts began to be printed in the form of lithographies in the 1st half of 19th century (mainly in Istanbul). Illustrations were the essential part of those lithograph publications.

The subject of illustration in those lithographies are often major plot twists such as lover's date, wedding, confrontation of main heroes, the hunt, the death of characters. The text of the narrative can change in different editions of the same story from different years, its traditional beginning (or the end of a *hikayat*) may even disappear, but the illustrations often remain in their places which were assigned to them by the composition of the story.

Illustrations of Turkish lithographies often reproduced well-known classical scenes of Persian miniatures, but with some changes and only in forms of sketchy and rough copies, retaining only the external compositional features of the source. However, unlike miniatures, illustrations in the lithographies are meant only to accompany the text of the folk story itself, they cannot exist separately from it.

The reach of an artistic perfection of the image was not on the first plan, but the most important goal was marking of the major plot twists of the folk narrative. Thus, illustrations in the lithographies of the Turkish *hikayats* can be considered as another — non-verbal — way of reinforcement of the folk text outline.

**Keywords:** Turkish folk narrative, lithograph printing, illustration, miniature, manuscripts, storyteller

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**Özet:** Hikâye (hikâyat) adı verilen Türk halk anlatısı türü, özellikle Türkiye'nin doğu ve güney bölgelerinde Orta Çağ'dan beri varlığını sürdüren Türk halk edebiyatına ait özel bir türdür. Hikâyeler, hikâye anlatıcıları tarafından sözlü olarak aktarılabilen ve halk türküleri ile şiirlerini de içeren düz yazı metinleridir. Bu edebi türün asıl özelliği hem sözlü hem de yazılı gelenekte yer alıyor olmasıdır. Hikâye metinleri, ağırlıklı olarak İstanbul'da, 19.yüzyılın ilk yarısından itibaren taş baskı ile basılmaya başlanmıştır. Resimleme, söz konusu taş baskı yayınlarda vazgeçilmez bir parçadır.

Taş baskılarda görülen resimlerin konuları genelde sevgililerin buluşması, evlilik, ana karakterlerin karşılaşması, av, karakterlerin ölümü gibi hikâyedeki dönüm noktalarıdır. Aynı hikâyeye ait anlatı metinleri, yıllarla beraber değişebilmekte, hikâyenin bilindik başı ya da sonu kaybolabilmektedir. Buna karşın, resimlerin hikâye düzenindeki yeri genellikle aynı kalmaktadır.

Türk taş baskılarındaki resimler genellikle bilinen klasik İran minyatürlerinin kopyalanması ile meydana getirilmiştir; ancak kabataslak kopyalarda, bazı değişikliklerle birlikte, yalnızca asıl kaynaktaki resim düzeninin dış özellikleri korunur. Bununla birlikte, minyatürlerden farklı olarak, taş baskılardaki resimler yalnızca halk hikâyesine eşlik etmek için vardır; hikâyeden ayrı bir parça olarak var olamaz.

Taş baskılarda öncelikli amaç resimde sanatsal bir mükemmelliğe ulaşmak değildir. Taş baskılardaki resimlemede en önemli hedef, halk anlatısındaki önemli dönüm noktalarını göstermektir. Bu nedenle, taş baskı Türk hikâyelerindeki resimler, halk hikâyesi metninin ana hatlarını pekiştiren sözsüz bir araç olarak düşünülebilir.

**Anahtar Sözcükler:** Halk anlatıları, halk edebiyatı, hikâyat, taş baskı, resimleme

Turkish prose narrative folk tale (*halk hikâyesi*, or *hikayat*) takes a special place in Turkish folklore and Turkish literature in general. Frequently texts of those narratives represent folklore versions of well-known plots from different literary traditions of the Middle East.

The traditional area of the origin and distribution of the Turkish folk narrative *hikayat* is considered as the northeast Turkey and the areas bordering Iran. It has been existing for a long time mainly in the South of Turkey and in the the Eastern Turkey since the Middle Ages. Throughout its existence, the Turkish folk narratives took an intermediate position not only between the literary tradition and folklore, but also between different

folklore genres, combining the features of fairy tales, folk theatre, folk poetry.

A *hikayat* is a prosaic text that includes folk songs and verses sometimes transmitted orally by story-tellers, *aşiks*. The main peculiarity of this genre (as a genre of Muslim folk books in general) is its existence in both oral and written traditions at the same time. Like Turkish folklore in general, these folk stories consist of many interacting components connected with different cultures: pre-Islamic Turkic tradition of the Oghuz tribes, Persian and Arabic traditions connected with Islam. A Turkish *hikayat* is thus a unit of the written and oral tradition.

If we speak about written tradition of Turkish folk narrative *hikaye*, firstly, we mean handwritten various versions of those narratives (for example: “Arzu ve Kanbar”, 1779, “İsmail-Şah” end 18–19 cc., “Tahir ve Zuhra”, dated 1266H., “Farhad ve Şirin”: 1757-1758<sup>1</sup>), and secondly the editions of the *hikayats* that took place in 19<sup>th</sup> century as litho- and typographic printing and which were intended for a wide range of readers (especially in cities).

When it comes to the concurrent oral existence of the Turkish folk narrative, the performance of *hikayats* was usual even, for example, for Istanbul at the beginning of the 20th century and in 1910-1920s<sup>2</sup>, and, according to W. Eberhard, in 1950s the performance of *hikayats* in the Southeastern Turkey could still compete with the printed literature and cinema<sup>3</sup>; in small towns of Anatolia, according to İlhan Başgöz, the art of performance of *meddah*-the storyteller was preserved until the 60-70's of 20th century<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Dmitrieva L.V. *Katalog tyurkskih rukopisej Instituta vostokovedeniya Rossijskoj akademii nauk*. M.: Vost. lit. RAN, 2002, 454-479.

<sup>2</sup> Gordlevskij V.A. “Stambulskie meddahi.” In Gordlevskij V.A. *Izbrannye sochineniya*. Vol. 2. *Yazyk i literatura*. M., 1961, 332-338; Gordlevskij V.A. “Iz nastoyashchego i proshlogo meddahov v Turcii.” In Gordlevskij V.A. *Izbrannye sochineniya*. T. 2. *Yazyk i literatura*. M., 1961, 300-313.

<sup>3</sup> Eberhard W. *Minstrel Tales from Southeastern Turkey*. Berkeley, 1955.

<sup>4</sup> Başgöz I. “The Tale-singer and His Audience: An Experiment to Determine the Effect of Different Audiences on a *Hikâye* Performance.” In *Turkish Folklore and Oral Literature. Selected Essays of İlhan Başgöz*. Ed. by Kemal Silay. Bloomington: Indiana University Turkish Studies, 1998, 76–77.

One of the main characteristic of Turkish prose narrative *hikayat* is a definite difference in the types of stories, due to their different origin. There are two types of *hikayat* (that division was made by P. N. Boratav, F. Türkmen, W. Eberhard): “heroic” type (for example, «Kör-oğlu hikâyesi», «İlbeylioglu») and “romantic” type (like «Gül ile Mir Ali Şir hikâyesi», «Leyla ile Mecnun»); as a rule, its plot is constructed on the basis of a love-story). The first type typically includes a series of short stories of prose version of the epic of Kör-oğlu, widely distributed in Asia Minor and also known in the Caucasus, the Middle East and Central Asia as well as a number of other stories, such as “İlbeylioglu”, “Celali-bey ile Mehmet-bey”, “Bey Böyrek”, “Kermanşah”. The major part of these narratives is genetically related to the oral epic tradition. So it is quite widely known in Turkey “Bey Böyrek” in terms of its plot closely associated with the stories of the well-known Oghuz book epic “the Book of Dede Qorqut”.

The second, so-called “romantic”, type usually attributed to those narrative *hikayats*, which plot is based on the story of mostly tragic love, or about the life of *aşik*, his love and attainment of a poetic talent. This type of folk narrative is most notably interesting so that it relies not so much on previously existing oral folklore, but on the literary sources and medieval Persian or Arab literature tradition. This type of *hikayat*, according to different sources, was very popular among the citizens of the Ottoman Empire of the nineteenth century and even to some extents had an impact on Turkish literary tradition: one of the first Turkish novels, “Love of Talat and Fitnat” (*Taaşşuk-i Talat wa Fitnat*), written by Shemseddin Sami, in its plot and some of the motives and the manner of narration and some peculiarities of composition moves closer to *hikayat* and some of the examples of the Turkish urban folklore. Thus, the Turkish folk narrative form not only was influenced by the literary traditions of the Middle East, as well as the historical and cultural processes that occurred in the Ottoman Empire (for example, the reform era of Tanzimat), but also influenced the emergence of the Turkish novel.

Texts of *hikayats* began to be printed in the form of lithographies (later – in typographies) in the first half of 19th century (mainly in

Istanbul). Of course, book publishing in Turkey existed long before the beginning of large-scale reforms<sup>5</sup>. As it is well known, the printing in the Ottoman Empire was opposed by the Muslim clergy: thus, the first Turkish typography of Ibrahim Muteferrika (1727) was destroyed. Some researchers explain this with the prevailing concept in Islam that the name of the God and also the text of the Quran, which is revealed from Allah, cannot be reproduced by any mechanical printing or even lithographic methods, because the text might be wrong or it might be touched by hands of an infidel<sup>6</sup>. Another force opposing the introduction of printing were scribes-*hattat*, because the distribution of printing deprived them of a means of subsistence. A.D. Zheltyakov writes that “printed book, especially a book of a secular content, by the eyes of most bibliophiles of the Tanzimat era continued to remain still as inferior, second-rate and did not deserve such attention as handwritten”<sup>7</sup>. Accordingly, in the first half of the 19th century technique of lithography (*taşbasmacı*), which also was significantly cheaper than the printing typograph press, got wide distribution. The first lithographies appear in Istanbul — as, for example, the famous lithograph of Henri Kayole founded with the support Husrev Pasha<sup>8</sup>.

The popularity of lithography had a huge influence on the existence of hikayats. As a result, a large part of publications of texts of the Turkish folk narratives of the first half of the 19th century was made in the technique of lithography. Romantic folk narratives with the contents primarily related to various traditional narrative genres of Arabic, Persian and Turkic literature already have been prevailing in general in the second half of the 19th century among printed and lithograph editions, which had

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<sup>5</sup> See also: Zheltyakov A.D. *Pechat v obshchestvenno-politicheskoy i kulturnoy zhizni Turcii: (1729–1908 gg.)* / AN SSSR. In-t vostokovedeniya, LGU. M.: Nauka, 1972; *History of the Ottoman State, Society and Civilization*. Vol. 2. Ed. by E. İhsanoğlu. İstanbul: IRCICA, 2002, 76–77.

<sup>6</sup> Dmitrieva L.V. “Tureckaya arabopismennaya rukopisnaya kniga.” In *Rukopisnaya kniga v kulture narodov Vostoka*. Vol. 1. M.: GRVL, 1987, 471.

<sup>7</sup> Zheltyakov, 49–50.

<sup>8</sup> See: *History of the Ottoman State, Society and Civilization*. Vol. 2; Gerçek S.N. *Türk matbaacılığı*. İstanbul: Devlet basımevi, 1939.

certain popularity among the citizens of the Ottoman Empire (see, for example, lists of Schlechta-Wssehrd, M. Belin, different catalogues of the typographies: “Bin bir gece”/ “One thousand and one night”, “Hurşid ile Mahru hikâyesi”, “Kıssa-i Yusuf ve Zuleykha”, Turkish version of writing known as “Alf nahr wa nahar”, Turkish version of the famous arabic folk novel about Sayf Zu-I-Yazan, “Kırk vezir tarihi” and so on<sup>9</sup>).

Due to the fact that the printing plate used in lithography was a flat stone, an opportunity arose to place pictures in the text, and those pictures soon became an essential part of such an issue. Lithographs often illustrate key points, or the most sharp plot twists (fig.1-3)<sup>10</sup>: a lovers date, wedding,



fig. 1



fig. 2

confrontation of the main characters of the *hikayat* (for example, in “Şah İsmail ile Gülzar hikayesi” this is the fight between Arapozengi — *pahlivan*-girl— and Ismail-shah), death of the characters (thus, for example, the tragic outcome of the *hikayat* about Kerem and Aslı (“Aşık

<sup>9</sup> See: Belin M. “Bibliographie ottomane ou notice des livres turcs imprimés à Constantinople durant les années 1284 et 1285 de l’hégire” *Journal Asiatique*. Août – Septembre. Sér. 6 / T. 14 (1869); Schlechta-Wssehrd O. Freiherr von. “Verzeichniss der in Constantinopel letzterschiedenen orientalischen Drucke und Litographien” *Zeitschrift der deutschen morgenländischen Gesellschaft*. Bd. IX. (1855) published in: *Sitzungsberichte der kaiserlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften* su Wien, Juni 1854.

<sup>10</sup> All illustrations in that paper are from lithographies of Turkish *hikayats* kept in Russian State library, Berlin State library and the collection of the Scientific library of MGIMO (University) of the MFA of Russia.

Kerem ile Aslı Han”), which is the death of Aslı and the self-burning of Kerem, is often depicted in the corresponding lithographies). In the editions of the same folk narrative story in different years it is possible to trace the changes in the text of the story itself (it’s traditional entry or ending can even disappear<sup>11</sup>), but the figures, pictures often remain in their places

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fig. 3

composition of the story.

Thus, illustrations in the lithographies of the Turkish *hikayats* can be considered as another — non-verbal — way of reinforcement of the folk (and therefore, constantly varying) text outline. The reach of an artistic perfection of the image was not on the first plan, but the most important was marking of the major plot twists of the folk narrative.

If we judge these illustrations from a purely aesthetic point of view, their sketches and compositions, which look like an awkward child’s drawing, become evident. Frequently the heroine of any *hikayat* —

<sup>11</sup> Turkish *hikayat* has a definable structure, based on the following compositional principle: clearly distinguished initial formula, formulae of change of the episodes and the input of poetic passages; as for the endings, they usually consist of a number of elements with stylistic parallels in other genres of Turkic folklore. This structure, being quite stable over time, may change substantially or even sometimes be violated - as is the case with new editions of Turkish *hikayats* (for example, an initial formula or ending may change or disappear); however, it is nearly the same for the oral and for “book” existence of this genre.

Gülüzar (“Şah İsmail ile Gülzar hikayesi”), or Şirin (“Farhad ve Şirin”), or Zuhra (“Tahir ve Zuhra hikayesi”) - whose appearance in the text of the story is described by the usual and standard cliché and set of epithets (“more beautiful than *guri* and more charming than *peri*”), was depicted quite ugly, unattractive, clumsy and far from the traditional poetic ideal of the Oriental beauty.

As a rule, illustrations in these lithographs are not subscribed, because often their authors were not professional artists or draftsmen — unlike manuscripts, where the work of a calligrapher and an artist-miniaturist has its independent significance. Sometimes illustrations seem



fig. 4



fig.5

to be vague and unclear and that is the consequence of its repeated copying from previous lithograph editions (fig. 4).

However, researchers distinguish three main stylistic features of illustrations: “primitive”, “childish”, with a rough drawing (fig. 5); more professional, skillful in its composition (fig. 6); and finally, obviously influenced by the traditional decoration of manuscripts and miniatures. As



a rule, the style of the illustration does not depend on the time of the publication of lithography.



fig.6

The connection of these illustrations with such a traditional genre of Persian and Turkish fine arts as miniature is especially noticeable. This is due primarily to the fact that the most popular folk narratives have non-Turkish origin.

Thus, the plots of the *hikayats* about Leyla and Medjnun, Farhad and Shirin come to Turkish folklore from Persian literature — first of all, poems of Nizami Gyandzhevi, Amir Khosrov Dikhavi, Abderrahman Djami (“Leyla and Medjnun” and “Yusuf and Zuleykha”, included to his famous “Haft Aurang”). It is also important that for a long time in Istanbul most of the lithographs and typographies were held by the

Persians, Armenians or the Turks who had come from Iran. Until very recently illustrated lithographic editions of popular *hikayats* that were sold in the famous Istanbul book market *Sahaflar çarşısı*<sup>12</sup> had been known as *Acem baskısı*, i.e. “Persian books”.

Famous classical scenes of Persian miniatures with some changes were reproduced in lithographs — of course, in the form of schematic and rough copies, retaining only the external compositional characteristics of the source (figures are turned to the viewer's face; their static nature, “lifelessness” is kept in the lithograph) (fig. 7). However, despite this direct loan, miniatures and lithograph drawings have different purpose: picture in the lithography of the folk narrative only illustrates and

<sup>12</sup> *Sahaflar Çarşısı* is the oldest book market in Istanbul.

accompanies the text, it cannot exist separately from it, but the miniature has its own worth, it is valuable itself.



fig. 7

In the folk narratives of the “heroic” type, even if they have a love line in its plot, hunting scenes and exploits and deeds of the main character are usually portrayed, while in editions of the novels of “romantic” content the most often we can meet depicting of the scenes mentioned above - a lovers’ date, wedding or death of heroes.

As it has been already mentioned, throughout its existence, Turkish *hikaye* took an intermediate position not only between literature and folklore, but also between different folklore genres, combining the features of fairy tale, folk theatre and folk (*aşık*) poetry. The way of presentation and the fantastic nature of some stories make *hikayat* to be related with a fairy tale. They also have common characters, such as the prophet *Hızır* / *Hizr*, *dev* / *div*, an old witch, a dragon, a moor / *Arab* (“*Arab Pahlavan*”, *Arapozengi*), dervish, *Keloglan*. As a rule, their functions are also the same: the Holy *Hızır* (or sometimes dervish) in *hikayat* appearing in the form of an old white-bearded man, as in a fairy tale, miraculously helps the main characters to overcome different obstacles.

No less than with a fairy tale, Turkish narrative *hikayats* is associated with an another traditional genre of the Turkish folklore — folk theatre *karagöz*. Oral performance of the Turkish folk narratives was a

special art with its own special rules, so the art of *meddah* (narrator) is often referred to the genres of the Turkish folk theater itself. The same plot could exist in the narrative hikaye form and also in the theater (for example, the story of Tahir and Zuhra was presented both as the prose narrative hikaye and as the piece of the *karagöz* performance). It is possible to find the features of appearance of the heroes of the *karagöz* theatre in depictings of the characters of the *hikaye*.

The rise of the circulation of books and literacy naturally caused a decline of interest in the art of the storyteller. In his article, referring to 1910, almost a century after the beginning of the reforms (Tanzimat reforms), V.A. Gordlevskiy writes about Istanbul *meddahs*: “In a new way of life meddahs are already anachronisms. Their stories turned to one shaped, pathetic stereotypes, and even attention of the unpretentious audience at Constantinople, on the approach of Ramadan to an end, more and more waning. Unwillingly meddahs are sad about the irrevocable times when coffee houses of Istanbul were crowded and full of audience on their sessions”<sup>13</sup>.

We can add that interest in the Ottoman Turkey fell not only to storytellers-*aşiks*, but also to the manuscript art in general. Oral folklore and manuscript art, that coexisted for a long time and gave rise to a special genre of Turkish literature, forever ceased to exist in the twentieth century. Typography and lithograph printing not just “killed” the manuscript art, but also made unnecessary the profession of the narrator itself. However, Turkish printed folktales-*hikayat* with its naive and sometimes even primitive illustrations remained monuments telling us about not-so-distant past.

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<sup>13</sup> Gordlevskiy, *Iz nastoyashchego i proshlogo meddahov v Turcii*, 308.