

Symmetrical Structures in the Ancient and Medieval
Turkic Poetry

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A theory of the origin of poetry, created by the eminent Russian philologist A.N. Veselovski, who also coined the term of "historical poetics", is based on a wide-ranging study of the European, Asian and Australian folklore, as well as the Graeco-Roman, West European and a section of Oriental literatures. According to this theory, poetry had emerged from a single primitive culture and gradually developed into a distinctive art. Eventually, the distinctive kinds of verbal art, epics, lyrics and drama, evolved from the primitive syncretism of folk poetry. The primitive poetry was linked with ritual. At first, it performed extra-aesthetic functions, and was recited in a chorus. The language of poetry was evolving on the basis of "psychological parallelism", which produced the main elements of the figurative speech: comparisons, metaphors and poetic symbols.

The "psychological parallelism" was also the basis on which the symmetrical structures emerged in poetry, because poetry is distinguished by lexical, phonetic, morphological and syntactic parallelism at all levels of poetic language. Rhythm is based on symmetrical recurrence of strong and weak (long and short, stressed and unstressed) units of verse forming the metrical arrangement of feet in two or more lines of poetry. Rhyme is a phonic symmetry at the ends of lines. It has two functions, the rhythmic function (stresses the rhythm of verse) and the stanzaic function (combines the lines of poetry into stanzas). Poetical figures are symmetri-

cal structures based on various types of symmetry, including rhythmic symmetry, rhymic symmetry and semantic constructions symmetry. These general definitions are applicable to the theory of poetry of any nations. However, in various cultural traditions they have distinctive features explained by phenomena which transgress the limits of poetry and literature as a whole.

The history of evolution of poetic forms in the ancient and medieval Turkic literatures offers a striking example to above thesis. The ancient Turkic literature, found over a vast territory of Central Asia, Southern and Western Siberia, includes poetry in the runic, Manichaeian and Uighur script. These are either specialized religious texts of prayers and hymns, or texts of more common usage - epitaphs and epic (historico-heroic) poems, created from the mid-8th century (although the Turkic poetic tradition undoubtedly emerged earlier) to approximately the 13th century. The ancient Turkic literature belongs to the pre-Islamic period of history of the Turkic peoples and reflects the religio-cultural environment (pre-shamanic, shamanic, Manichaeian and Buddhist) within which it was evolved. The language of the ancient Turkic poetry was based on specific linguistic norms because, as is known, any system of versification (the rhythmic and phonic arrangement of verse) emerges on the basis of phonetic laws of a specific language. In the ancient Turkic poetry, phonic arrangement of verse is constituted by the alliteration system. It is a verse with symmetrical rhythmic and euphonic structures at the beginning of the lines. In contrast with anaphora, which only is a means of poetic decoration in any national poetry, the ancient Turkic alliteration system constitutes a regular device for stressing the rhythmic pulse of the verse (word or horizontal alliteration) and for combining the lines into stanzas of various length (vertical or stanzaic alliteration). The alliteration system, fixing the symmetrical rhythmic structures at the beginning of the

lines was compulsory for the ancient Turkic poetry.

The beginning of conversion to Islam of the Central Asian Turkic peoples in the mid-10th century opened a new era in the development of their culture and aesthetics. With the spread of Islam and Islamic culture in Central Asia, Asia Minor, Transcaucasia and the Volga Region, the Turkic peoples adopted the Arabic writing and language of the Qur'an and acquainted themselves with the classic Arabic and Persian literatures. The creation of the classic Turkic poetry started in the 11th century. Now, this poetry was formed on the basis of aesthetic ideas which were different from those of the ancient Turkic poetry. It was explained by the spread, in the Turkic milieu, of the Arabic and Persian poetics, including the theory of meters called 'aruz', the theory of rhyme and the theory of poetic figures.

With adoption of aruz (the quantitative versification), the Turkic poetry was obliged to turn from alliteration system to rhyme at the ends of the lines, because any type of versification is based on the correspondence between the rhythmic and the phonic arrangement of the verse. For this reason, the ancient Turkic tonic-temporal versification (the irregular recurrence of the lines, with the unequal number of syllables, balanced by the period of utterance) combined with the alliteration system, was in the classic poetry replaced by rigidly fixed aruz meters and the exact rhyme at the ends of the lines.

It was difficult to write poetry by laws of versification created on the basis of Arabic and Persian languages. For this reason, beginning from the 11th century a series of devices were created to adapt the aruz to the Turkic language. Eventually, the balance was established between the intrinsic properties of the Turkic language and the laws of poetics borrowed from the alien linguistic

and cultural tradition. Therefore, the shift in fixing of the rhythmic symmetry of verse by the phonic symmetry from the beginning of the lines (alliteration system) to the end of the lines (rhyme) was explained by ideological changes occurring in the Turkic culture.

In dealing with the replacement of one system of versification by another system during the transition from the epoch of the ancient Turkic literature to the epoch of the classic Turkic literature one notices the increasing number of symmetrical structures in poetry. The Arabic-Persian theory of poetic figures, the number of which is great, is very elaborate and formalized. There are semantic (verbal), phonic, and graphic (based on the beauty and distinction of Arabic characters) poetic figures. There is usually a definite correspondence between poetic figures and rhythmic structures of the verse. Some of the figures are designed to stress the melody of verse by sound similarities (phonic symmetry). *Murā'āt an-nazīr*, for example, is called the "double symmetry". This semantic figure uses the names of uniform things or similar notions.

The classic poetry seems to be encased in a shell of symmetrical correlated structures. This impression is created by the entirety of poetic figures, types of rhyme and *radīfs*, as well as rigid fixation of meters in *aruz*. In the ancient Turkic poetry, symmetrical rhythmic and phonic structures are arranged in a relatively free manner; for example, the alliteration at the beginning of the verse may be extended to two, three or more lines, or be repeated every other line at random, according to the writer's plan. In the classic poetry, in turn, there is a compulsory correspondence between the type of rhyme and the laws of genre (*masnavi*, *ghazal*, etc.).

The elaborate theory of poetry, created by several generations of the Arabic and Persian scholars, and adopted by the Turkic literature, shows the attitude of Islamic culture to poetic language. The creation of poetry by the laws of this theory suggests that

profound changes occurred in the psychology and aesthetic ideas of the Turkic peoples.

For this reason, the symmetrical structures of the Turkic poetry mark cultural epochs in the history of the Turkic peoples.