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THE EXPRESSIONS „FISH-TOOTH“ AND „LION-FISH“
IN TURKISH AND PERSIAN

Not only *libelli* have *sua fata*... Sometimes a single word, the verbal reflection of a material object, can detach itself and follow a different path and much time and effort is needed to blend them together, just like an object and its reflection in the viewfinder of a camera, again into one image well-delineated and true. This was also the case with the two expressions mentioned in the title.

Among the multitude of valuable and sometimes precious objects listed in the inventory of the inheritance after 'Ali Çelebi, a high Turkish fiscal official at Buda, drawn on 15th to 18th şafer 996 H. (15th—18th January A. D. 1587), which list was edited by the late lamented Professor L. Fekete, and published recently as a posthumous article, there is one knife and five penknives — each with a handle called *balık dişli*¹. The renowned Turkish traveller Evliyâ Çelebi, in his description of St. Stephen's Cathedral in Vienna (which he went to visit in 1665) noted that the stalls with which the church had been endowed by the kings and other magnates of the Christian world, were made

¹ L. Fekete, *Das Heim des 'Ali Çelebi, eines türkischen Defterbeamters in Buda*, in: *Fontes orientales ad historiam populorum Europae Meridie-Orientalis atque Centralis portinentes — Vostochnye istochniki po istorii narodov Yugo-Vostochnoi i Centralnoi Evropy*, vol. II, Moscow, 1969, p. 40 (No. 210) and 41 (No. 224).

„of birds' bones and human bones, of *balık dişi* and ivory and, in fine, of every kind of wood“².

The expression *balık dişi*, lit. 'fish-tooth', is not recorded in the Turkish dictionaries or in those of other Turkic languages. The orientalist who have concerned themselves with the cited texts, had to rely on conjecture. Dr R. F. Kreutel who had started working on the Turkish report about Vienna in the nineteen fifties and was the first to be faced with the puzzle, came to the conclusion that Evliyâ Çelebi — and author in whose work reality is frequently intertwined with sheer fantasy — by this expression had implied fish-bones („aus Fischgräten“)³. Prof. L. Fekete in his fine essay founded, as it were, on the bare data of the inventory of the property left by 'Alî Çelebi, mentioned a knife with a handle ornamented with fish-teeth („mit Fischzähnen“) and penknives with whalebone handles („aus Fischbein“)⁴; later, however, when he was editing the said inventory, he discarded the literal translation of the expression *balık dişi* and in both cases recorded whalebone handles⁵.

'Alî Çelebi left also, among others, a raincoat of red cloth, with buttons made of *şir-māhî*. This official had also, by virtue of his profession, as many as thirty cane-pens and in addition to this, three plates in hard material, on which he used to trim the cane reeds, blunted by writing. One of these plates was made of ebony, the second of copper, and the third — just like the raincoat buttons of the same man — was made of *şir-māhî*⁶.

The expression *şir-māhî*, lit. 'lion-fish', occurs in a number of dictionaries. F. Steingass explains it as follows: „(lion-fish) A fish of whose bones they make knife-handles“. The Turkish

² Evliyâ Çelebi *Seyâhatnâması*, vol. VII, İstanbul, 1928, p. 269.

³ *Im Reiche des Goldenen Apfels*. Des türkischen Weltenbummlers Evliyâ Çelebi denkwürdige Reise in das Giaurenland und in die Stadt und Festung Wien anno 1665. Übersetzt, eingeleitet und erklärt von Richard F. Kreutel, Graz—Wien—Köln, 1957 (Osmaginische Geschichttschreiber herausg. von Dr. R. F. Kreutel, Bd. 2), p. 111.

⁴ L. Fekete, *Das Heim eines türkischen Herrn in der Provinz im XVI. Jahrhundert*, Budapest 1960 (Studia Historica Acad. Scient. Hungaricae, 29), pp. 12 and 23, respectively.

⁵ L. Fekete, *Das Heim des 'Alî Çelebi*, l. cit.

⁶ L. Fekete, *op. cit.*, p. 37 (No. 164) and 42 (No. 250).

lexicographer N. R. Büngöl, s. v. *som* writes: „This is a tooth resembling ivory, called the core of ivory (in both cases he uses the word *fildişi*, lit. 'elephants tusk' — Z. A.)... By its use its surface gets a wavy appearance and it becomes uncommonly beautiful... Rosaries made of it, which after some time acquire a green tinge, are called *şirmaî*“. Prof. L. Fekete, when quoting these two passages, translated the expression *şir-māhî* in both his works and in both cases by the German „Fischbein“⁷.

By translating both *balık dişi* and *şir-māhî* as „Fischbein“, he presumably thought that in both cases the same material was used.

In both compound expressions there is only one common element: *balık* and *māhî* 'fish'. But F. Steingass has recorded also two exact Persian equivalents of the Turkish *balık dişi*: „*dandāni māhî*, The bones of a certain fish, of which they make knife-handles, & c.“ and „*māhî dandān*, A fish's tooth, of which the hilts of swords are made“⁸. The former expression is explained virtually in the same way as *şir-māhî*, while the latter in its explanation has, instead of „bones“, „tooth“, which is an exact replica of Persian *dandān* and Turkish *diş*. Besides, S. C. Paul read *şir-māhî* also not as comprising „the bones“ element: „a very big fish out of the tooth of which handles are made“⁹. Thus, the translation of *balık dişi* and *şir-māhî* by the same expression was correct. But were they „Fischgräte“, as the Austrian orientalist wanted them to be, or „Fischzähne“ or „Fischbein“, as it was supposed by the Master from Budapest?

In fact, neither the former nor the latter has substantiated their respective interpretations. As regards *balık dişi*, they both surely took into account the fact that even the largest fish cannot have teeth high enough to cover a knife-handle or to serve even

⁷ L. Fekete, *Das Heim eines türkischen Herrn*, pp. 10 and 23; *Das Heim des 'Alî Çelebi*, pp. 37 (No. 164), 42 (No. 250) and 61, note to No. 164 with quotations from: F. Steingass, *A comprehensive Persian-English Dictionary*, London, s. a., p. 774 and N. R. Büngöl, *Eski eserler ansiklopedisi*, Galata—İstanbul 1936, p. 211.

⁸ F. Steingass, *op. cit.*, p. 538 (s. v. *māhî*) and 1147.

⁹ S. C. Paul, *The New Royal Persian-English Dictionary*, 3th ed., Allahabad 1932, p. 233.

as an inlay of wooden stalls. I do not know whether the „Fischgräte“ of some fish can be used for the purpose. Of whalebone, which like horn can be processed by means of various techniques, really a great many utilizable and ornamental objects is made. Considering both *balık dişi* and *şir-māhī* to be „Fischbein“, Prof. L. Fekete might have associated the German word with „fish“ and „bones“ in F. Steingass' interpretation of *şir-māhī*, while on the other hand he probably did not consider seriously the Turkish *balık* and Persian *māhī*, since whalebone is provided not by a „fish“ but by a sea mammal. Its Turkish name is *balina* (from Italian *balena*) nad *balina balığı*, with the Turkish addition *balık* 'fish', and the case is very much the same with the names of this mammal in Polish („*wieloryb*“) and German („*Walfish*“) However, oriental peoples equally without good grounds regard also other sea mammals as fish, e. g., the seal is in Turkish *ayr balığı*, lit. 'bear-fish', the dolphin is in Turkish *yunus balığı*, in Persian *māhī-yi yunūs*, lit. 'Jonas's fish'; more than that, even the hippotamus is for the Turks a „horse-fish“ (at *balığı*). Now knowing, owing to R. N. Büngöl, that in Turkey *şirmai* (< *şir-māhī*) denotes a kind of *som* — a material similar to ivory from an elephant's tusk, and owing to other lexicographers that *som* means „the tusks of dolphin etc. (from which various objects are made)“¹⁰, or simply „ivory from a fish's tooth, rhinoceros horn, etc.“¹¹, and, on the other hand, that the best plates for sharpening cane-reed pens were made of hippopotamus teeth¹², let us look really for a „tooth“ — the hardest material which can be supplied by an animal commonly known as „fish“, though in fact not being one.

It seems that after F. Steingass the expressions *dandān-i māhī* and *māhī dandān* have not been recorded any more. As regards *şir-māhī*, the two available works of Persian lexicographers,

¹⁰ D. A. Magazanik, *Turecko-russkii slovar'*, 2nd ed., Moscow 1945: „*som* ... klyki delfina i pr. (idushchie na raznye podelki)“.

¹¹ H. C. Nony and F. İ z, *A Turkish-English Dictionary*, Oxford 1947, p. 306, s. v. *som*².

¹² Ch. White, *Drei Jahre in Constantinopel, oder Sitten und Einrichtungen der Türken*, Stuttgart 1846, vol. II, p. 185. (Quoted by L. Fekete, *Das Heim des 'Alī Çelebi*, p. 62, note to No. 231 of the inventory).

recently published, complicate the matter. S. M. A. Djemälzāde in 1963 wrote: „by *şir-māhī* are denoted the shining shells of which buttons are made, which are called «buttons of *şir-māhī*»“¹³. H. 'Amīd (a year latter) stated that this is „a kind of a big fish as well as a kind of shells, of which buttons are made“¹⁴. To understand how it happened that *şir-māhī* as a denomination of material („fish-tooth“) was transmitted to denote shining shells, one must remember that this *şirmai* with time becomes opalescent, gaining colours perhaps like those of some „shining shells“ in the Persian Gulf, while in Persian the name of „fish“ is extended also to the pearl-oyster and all sorts of mollusc¹⁵. But such an explanation of the *şir-māhī* expression is still insufficient — the more so as its original meaning had been explained in Persia at least 20 years before these two highly valuable dictionaries were published.

This was done by S. Haīm. According to him, *şir-māhī* is: „1. A sea-horse, also a walrus. 2. The teeth or bones of a fish. *L(oosely) Ivory*“¹⁶. Even the „*Taschenwörterbuch*“ by Gh. A. Tarbiat, reads: „*Walroß — şir-māhī*“¹⁷.

¹³ S. M. 'A. Camälzāde, *Farhang-e loğāt-e 'āmmiyāne*, Tahrān 1341 (1963 A. D.), p. 16: „*şir-māhī — şadafhā-ye barrāk-e-rā gūyand ke az ān tokme va nazāyer-e ān sāzand va ān tokmehārā tokme-ye şir-māhī nāmānd*“.

¹⁴ H. 'Amīd, *Farhang-e 'Amīd*, Tahrān 1342 (1946 A. D.), p. 693: „*şir-māhī -esm- nav'-e māhī-ye bozorg va niz nav'-e az şadafe ke az ān tokme dorost mikonand*“. The „big fish“ mentioned by this author, is probably the „*shir-māhī*, (milk-fish) Name of a delicious fish with white scales“, recorded by F. Steingass, *op. cit.*, p. 774 after the „lion-fish“ called by him *sher-māhī*.

¹⁵ S. Haīm, *New Persian-English Dictionary*, vol. II, Tehran 1936, p. 260, s. v. *şadaf*: „*māhī-ye şadaf, hayvān-e şadaf*, A shellfish; a mollusk; a pearl-oyster“.

¹⁶ S. Haīm, *op. cit.*, vol. II, pp. 239—240. — In: S. Haīm, *The Larger English-Persian Dictionary*, vol. II, Téhéran 1943, p. 1255 we find: „walrus — *şir-māhī, gorāz-māhī*“. The word *gorāz*, a component of the latter name of the walrus, means 'hog, boar', while B. V. Miller, *Persidsko-russkii slovar'*, 2nd ed., Moscow 1953, p. 418 explains that *gorāz-māhī* means 'buryi delfin, morskaya swinya' (i. e. 'porpoise, sea-hog'), a sea-mammal quite different from the walrus.

¹⁷ Gh. A. Tarbiat, *Deutsch-persisches Taschenwörterbuch*, Teheran 1339—1960, p. 630.

Thus, *şir-māhī* is, above all, a name of an animal — the walrus, a „fish“ only in that it is a sea-living mammal. Secondly, this is a name of the material supplied by the walrus, and which served (or still serves?) in the Orient to produce inlays to knives and swords, buttons, the beads of Muslim rosaries, or plates upon which cane-reed pens are sharpened. The material was still more accurately called *balık dişi* by the Turks, and *dandān-i māhī* or *māhī dandān* by the Persians, since it denotes hard, ivory-like, long (up to 75 cm) and heavy (up to 3 Kgs.) walrus tusks. Their name *şir-māhī* (or, in Turkey, *şirmai*) in view of a certain resemblance of walrus tusks to the other kinds of ivory, and even to certain shells known in Persia, might have been transferred with time also to these materials. The fact that the „lion-fish“ denoted originally the walrus, while the „fish-tooth“, first of all, a walrus tusk, is testified to by the name of this material in the country from which it used to be imported to Turkey and Persia.

The exporter of this valuable material at the time in question was the Muscovite Russia. The name *rybii zub* 'fish-tooth' denoting walrus tusks, exactly corresponding to *balık dişi* and *māhī dandān*, *dandān-i māhī* in Turkish and Persian, is to be found in Russian sources since 1160 through the seven teenthcentury, if not later¹⁸. Considerably earlier the „fish-tooth“ on contiguous areas had

¹⁸ On the *rybii zub* as an object of exportation from the Muscovy to the lands of the Orient by merchants and as a gift from the Russian Great Dukes and (since 1574) Tzars to the rulers of the neighbouring countries, its price and products made of it, cp. M. V. Fekhnner, *Torgovlya Russkogo gosudarstva so stranami vostoka v XVI veke* („The Trade of the Russian State with the Countries of the Orient in the XVIth Century“), Moscow 1956, pp. 63—64. Older sources containing this name of walrus tusks, are cited by I. I. Sreznevskii, *Materialy dlia slovaryia drevne-russkago yazyka po pismennym pamyatnikam*, vol. I., St. Petersburg 1893, p. 999 s. v. *zub* ('tooth') and vol. III, 1903, p. 207 s. v. *rybii* ('fish—'). A piece of fantastic information about „fish tooth“ heard in Moscow in 1655—1656 was recorded in Arabic by Paul of Aleppo, the son of Macarios, the schismatic Patriarch of Antiochia, in the report of his stay in the capital of the Tzars. Cf. Evliya Chelebi, *Kniga putestvstviya (Izvolecheniya iz sochineniya tureckogo putesthestvennika XVII veka). Perevod i kommentarii*. Vypusk I: *Zemli Moldavii i Ukrainy* („The Book of Travels... vol. I: The Lands of Moldavia and Ukraine“), ed. by A. S. Tveritina

been attested in Arabic sources. We owe information on the subject to Professor T. Lewicki, my honoured Master. Especially noteworthy are the words *asnān as-samak* 'fish-teeth', recorded in the oldest of these authors, al-Mukaddasī, who in 985—986 A. D. mentions them among the goods imported to Khwārizm from the land of the Bulghars¹⁹. The Arabic, Persian, and Turkish expressions „fish-tooth“ are in all probability a faithful replica of an analogous expression in the Turkic language of the Bulghars. But considering that the immediate neighbours of the providers of walrus tusks were the Russian tribes, one might assume that the Bulghar name was, in turn, a replica of the Russian one.

The search for the original of the expression „fish-tooth“ to denote walrus tusks would lead us too far. As to *şir-māhī* to denote the animal itself, there is no attested Russian or Turkish equivalent of it. Thus, this name of the exotic animal could have originated in Persia itself.

Now the Persians have another word which means 'walrus', viz. *mors* borrowed from the French *morse*. In Turkey, beside the traditional name *deniz ineği*, lit. 'sea-cow', it is called *mors* (again from the French) and its tusks are called *mors dişleri*, lit. 'walrus teeth'²⁰. The Arabs call it *fazz* — a 'harsh, morose' animal, or *fīl baħr*, lit. 'sea elephant'²¹.

I first came across *balık dişi* when I was editing and annotating the Polish translation of Evliya Çelebi's description of Vienna

and A. D. Zheltyakov, Moscow 1961, p. 252: note 20 to p. 50, where the expression *balık dişi* (in *Seyāhatnāme*, vol. V, p. 124) was translated as *rybii zub*.

¹⁹ T. Lewicki, *Ecrivains arabes du siècle IX au XVIe, traitant de l'ambre jaune de la Baltique et de son importation en pays arabes*, „Folia Orientalia“, vol. IV, Cracow 1963, pp. 7—8, 13, 14.

²⁰ Vançev N., Kerimov Y. and others, *Bālgarsko-türski rechnik — Bulgarca-türkçe sözlük*, Sofya 1961, p. 515 s. v. *morzh* ('walrus'). Incidentally, in Turkish it is common (just like in Persian; op. note 16 above) to confound the walrus with the seal: D. A. Magazanik and M. S. Mikhailov, *Russko-tureckii slovar'*, Moscow 1963, call both the walrus (p. 149 s. v. *morzh*) and the seal (p. 294 s. v. *tyulen*) *ayr bahçı*, lit. 'bear-fish'.

²¹ V. M. Borisov, *Russko-arabskii slovar'*, Moscow 1967, p. 455 s. v. *morzh*.

made by two colleagues of Warsaw²². I hope I have now somewhat contributed towards solving the puzzle, one of the many which beset the orientalists.

²² *Księga podróży Ewliji Czelebiego, Wybór* („The Book of Travels of E. Ç. A Selection“). Translated from Turkish by Z. Abrahamowicz, A. Dubiński and St. Płaskowicka-Rymkiewicz. Selected, edited, provided with preface and annotations by Z. Abrahamowicz. A bio- and bibliographical essay about E. Ç. and his work by J. Reychman, Warszawa 1969, p. 151 (translation) and 411 (note 66).

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ENCORE SUR LA DOCTRINE DU MAHDĪ IBN TŪMART

L'intransigeance dogmatique du Mahdī almohade Ibn Tūmart (m. en 1130) et son opposition violente au mālikisme qui dominait l'Occident musulman pouvaient aisément porter l'islamologie moderne à croire à une assez forte influence exercée sur l'impitoyable réformateur par la pensée zāhirite du fougueux polémiste andalou Ibn Hazm (m. en 1064). L'illustre Goldziher, dans ses études remarquables sur l'almohadisme et Ibn Tūmart, n'y a pas manqué. J'ai eu personnellement l'occasion, voici plus de vingt ans, dans un hommage à la mémoire du grand islamisant, de montrer sur un point précis — valeur épistémologique et juridique des Traditions transmises par voie unique — que le modèle d'Ibn Tūmart n'était pas Ibn Hazm, mais le fameux šāfi'ite-aš'arite orientale al-Gazālī (m. en 1111), ou l'un des prédécesseurs de celui-ci¹. Le thème relève de cette discipline juridico-religieuse qui s'appelle les *uṣūl al-fiqh*. C'est encore sur ce même terrain de l'herméneutique légaliste que les pages présentes vont se situer.

Goldziher a écrit: „C'est particulièrement sur deux questions spéciales des *ouçoul al-fiqh* que l'on aperçoit combien Ibn Tūmert suit la méthode des Zahirites. C'est un principe d'exégèse et de *fiqh*, admis de tout temps par les *madāhib* orthodoxes, que la forme impérative ou prohibitive d'un texte juridique n'implique pas toujours une obligation absolue, mais qu'il faut souvent

¹ R. Brunschvig, *Sur la doctrine du Mahdī Ibn Tūmart* (étude écrite en 1948) dans „Arabica“, II, 1955, pp. 137—148, et *Ignace Goldziher Memorial Volume*, II, Jérusalem, 1958, pp. 1—13.