

Elżbieta Świącicka 

Stockholm University, Sweden | elzbieta.swiecicka2014@gmail.com

The Swedish-Turkish Dictionary Written for Charles XII, King of Sweden: Preliminary Notes

Abstract For Europeans, developing expertise in the Turkish language and creating dictionaries was usually to meet the needs of missionaries, individuals on personal pilgrimages, or extended stays in Turkish captivity. These valuable dictionaries, some of which belong to the so-called transcription texts, i.e. written in alphabets other than Arabic alphabet. However, the origins of Petter Carling's Swedish-Turkish dictionary are quite different and unique. This dictionary was written in Ottoman Turkey, at the military camp of Swedish king, Charles XII, near the small fortress-town of Bender in modern day Moldova, following the Swedish defeat by Peter I of Russia at the battle of Poltava. Carling adopted the Latin writing system and Swedish spelling conventions to reflect the phonetic structure of Turkish, thereby capturing its pronunciation. The dictionary is a unique example of a transcription text and a practical illustration of cross-cultural communication, as it facilitates the exchange of information between people of different cultures, primarily for use in various business transactions that were needed to keep the military camp functioning.

Keywords Swedish-Turkish dictionary, Charles XII of Sweden, Petter Carling, Ottoman Empire, Great Northern War, transcription texts, historical lexicography, cross-cultural communication

1 Introduction

The Rogge Library's manuscript department in Strängnäs, a department of the National Library of Sweden, has a small book, approximately 23.6 × 9.3 × 2.7 cm in dimensions, bound in a dark, worn all-French binding. It is listed under *Tursk Dictionair skrifwin wid Bender af P. Carling, Holmensis in Suecia*¹ without a signum. After the author's title on p. 5, it reads: Turkish Dictionary written in Bender by P. Carling, *Stockholmer in Sweden*.

The dictionary was written in Bender, in modern day Moldova, as the author Petter Carling writes in the title. Petter Carling was a member of the Royal Swedish Expedition as a non-commissioned officer (Djurberg 1913: 105–106) in 1710, and

¹ The title is noted on p. 10 of the digitised version, which includes binding and a couple of blank pages. In English: 'Turkish Dictionary, written in Bender by P. Carling, Stockholmer in Sweden'. The book remains in manuscript. *Dictionair* was donated to the library in Strängnäs in October 1825, according to a note on the last page of the book: *Given till Kungl. Gimmnasii Bibliotheket i Strengths af framl. Enkefru Lectorskan Haggrenn, Sterbhus d. 4 Oct. 1825*.



then as an appointed Field Commissary in the Bender Dragoon Regiment in 1711. The Royal Swedish Expedition was led by the eleven remaining members of the Swedish Life Regiment not killed or captured following Charles XII's 'poltavian action', i.e. the defeat at Poltava on 28 June 1709. About thirty thousand Swedes had been taken prisoner by the Russians, but Carling was one of those who, through a miracle, as he writes in his memoirs,² managed to escape Russian captivity and join Charles XII in Bender, which at that time belonged to the Ottoman Empire.

2 Historical background

Sweden entered the 18th century as a great power with foreign possessions including Finland, Estonia, Livonia, Pomerania, and the mouths of the Oder, Elbe, and Weser, which were important customs collection points. Between 1700 and 1721, Sweden was at war, fighting what is known as the Great Nordic War in Swedish history, when Charles XII (1682–1718), king of Sweden (1697–1718), facing off against Frederick IV of Denmark-Norway, August II the Strong of Saxony-Poland-Lithuania, and Peter I of Muscovy/Russia, whose goal was expansion and securing access to the Baltic Sea.³ The defence of the Baltic started well for the Swedish king with victories at Travendal and Narva, against the Danes and Russians respectively, in 1700, but soon Peter I gained ground in the Swedish Baltic provinces. He was able to secure Russia's access to the Baltic Sea and founded Saint Petersburg in 1703.

In Poland-Lithuania, the political situation was chaotic, with two competing kings backed by the different warring factions: Augustus the Strong (1697–1706, 1709–1733), who was supported by Peter I, and Stanisław Leszczyński (1704–1710), who was appointed and supported by Charles XII. Allied to the Swedish side were the House of Holstein-Gottorp and the Cossacks under the Cossack hetman Ivan Mazepa (1708–1710).⁴ The Crimean Tatars, under the leadership of Khan Devlet II Girey (1699–1702), (1709–1713) and Kaplan I Girey (1713–1715) also wanted to join the Swedish anti-Russian campaign, and they took part in some battles, but were either prevented by the Sublime Porte (the Ottoman government), as in 1708, or Charles XII's

² Copy of Carling's 'Memorial' and statements 17 March 1735, Avräkningskontoret 3683. In Memorial, he writes about his 34 years of service rendered to the King and the Crown, his many adventures endured, severe captivity and afterwards distress and poverty. He expected some pension for his 34 years of service and hardship. Only in 1739 was his request heard, and he was granted an annual expectation salary of 50 thalers (silver) coins.

³ There are many publications on this subject, as in Wikander (1922); see also the consistent description of the life and activities of Charles XII in Larsson (2009: 21, 37–39, 64, 65, 115, 116, 143–155).

⁴ Mazepa Ivan (Jan) was the Zaporozhian Hetman who, along with 3,000 Cossacks, refused to submit to Tsar Peter I, and hoped that Charles XII would help him regain power in Ukraine. Charles XII likely granted Mazepa the right to use the colours of the Swedish military *bandera* (yellow and blue) as the insignia of the Cossack detachments led by Mazepa. Later, these would be the colours of the flag of Ukraine. Mazepa's successor was Polyp Orlyk (1672–1742), who accompanied Charles XII to Bender. He is the author of one of the oldest democratic constitutions, called the Bender Constitution, written in 1710. The original is in *Diplomatica Cosacica* in The Swedish National Archives. Accessed 1 October 2025. <https://sok.riksarkivet.se/arkiv/FIMNeBUQrH6d0002H087k3>.

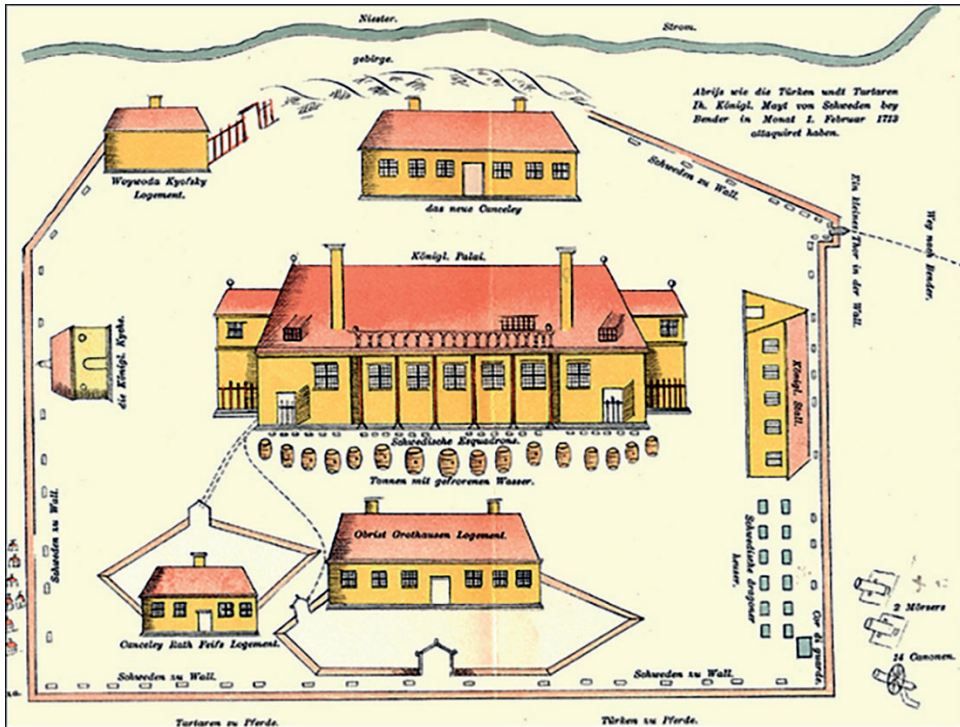


Figure 1. Contemporary depiction of Charles XII's camp near Bender. The camp was used from 1711 to the Skirmish at Bender in 1713

(Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ritning_%C3%B6ver_Karlopolis.jpg)

hesitation on whether to allow them to join the coalition, as in 1710.⁵ The Swedish king Charles XII and his allies' forces were finally defeated by Peter I in 1709 at Poltava, located in modern day Ukraine. After the battle, the defeated king fled to the fortress town of Bender in the western part of the Ottoman Empire, accompanied by approximately 1,000 Swedes, both military personnel and civilians.⁶

Charles XII installed himself on Ottoman soil, in a newly built camp at the village of Varnitsa next to the town. He soon sent his secretary Martin Neugebauer and the Polish general Stanisław Poniatowski to the Grand Vizier Çorlulu Damat Ali Pasha, with a letter to Sultan Ahmed III thanking him for giving the Swedes sanctuary and asking the Sultan to accept Neugebauer as an envoy with the right to stay in the

⁵ Since the 16th century, the Crimean Tatars had been trying to draw the Swedes' attention to Moscow's growing military power and appetite for territories neighbouring Moscow. Since the reign of John III, the Swedes were offered Tatar help if they decided to start a war against Russia. It was not 'received with any particular enthusiasm by the Swedes at that time' (Zetterstéen 1952; Świącicka 1997; Świącicka 2002).

⁶ Then, Bender was a fortress on the border of the Ottoman state, under a *Sereskier*, an Ottoman Commander. The province of Moldavia had limited autonomy under Prince Nikolaos Mavrokordato. Today, it is a large city in Moldova known as Bendery.

capital. The king intended to enter an alliance of attack and defence with the Ottomans (Refik 1922: 11–13). Alternatively, the Sublime Porte also offered to escort the king through Poland to Sweden under the protection of Turkish and Cossack troops.

Negotiations were delayed by Charles XII, who still harboured hopes of returning to the political scene and continuing the war against Moscow and its allies.⁷ Such an opportunity arose in 1711, two years after the king had arrived at Bender, after Tsar Peter and his troops were surrounded by Turkish-Tatar-Polish-Swedish troops in the basin of the Prut River in present-day Moldavia. For various reasons, the Ottoman Grand Vizier Baltacı Mehmet Pasha squandered the advantage, and after the battle signed an unfavourable treaty for peace with Peter I, later ratified as the Treaty of Adrianople of 1713 (Stille 1918: 361–367; Wikander 1922: 140–142).

After Ahmed III had signed the Treaty of the Pruth making peace with Russia in 1711, he wrote a personal letter to Charles XII that the king ‘should, however, be able to return to his kingdoms unhindered’ (Tengberg 1953: 193).

The Sublime Porte repeatedly urged the king to leave Ottoman territory to avoid conflict with Russia and eventually demanded his departure. However, the king chose to delay his departure due to fear of the dangerous journey through Poland,⁸ and mounting financial difficulties (Tengberg 1953: 223, 244). Finally, in February 1713, the Ottomans decided to dislodge the king from his camp by force, and after several dramatic confrontations, such as the famous *kalabalik*⁹ (skirmish), forced him to leave Bender.

After a short stay in Timurtasch outside Adrianople and in Demotika (Gouridis and Sandin 2015: 122–141), the Swedish king, his entourage and what was left of his army made a remarkable two-week ride through Central Europe, arriving at Stralsund, the penultimate Swedish stronghold on the European continent, in October 1714.¹⁰

3 Dictionary

A closer look at the dictionary and additional texts in the notes show the reasons behind its creation.

⁷ The Ottoman Empire, Crimean Tatars with Devlet II Girey, Polish King Stanisław Leszczyński, and the Cossack hetman Ivan Mazepa and his relative, Polyp Orlyk; The Swedish-Tatar-Turkish contacts were beneficial for all parties, to keep the Russians in check. Charles XII, his policies and especially his stay in the Ottoman Empire, have been the subject of numerous publications. See Ericson Wolke (2015: 13–23); Savchuk (2015:175–188); For Stanisław Leszczyński in Bender, see Kowalik (1973:121–142).

⁸ By then, Augustus the Strong had returned as a military actor in Poland. The Sublime Porte wished that Charles XII would sue for peace with Augustus to instead focus on Sweden and the Ottoman’s shared enemy of Russia, but Charles refused (Tengberg, 1953: 209).

⁹ In Carling’s dictionary, p. 64 <*kala balek*> folks myckenhet (crowd of people) (Liljegren 2015: 88–105).

¹⁰ After the Regiment’s withdrawal from Turkey, Carling participated in the defence of Swedish Pomerania and Stralsund, which Charles XII led from November 1714. In December 1715, the king was forced to flee to Scania, while Carling ended up in Danish captivity. Again, Carling managed to escape, received the same instructions from the Royal War Expedition as before, and was sent to Visingsö, as is evident from the description of the Dragoon Regiment’s commander, Colonel Anders Koskull. The Military Archives (KrA), documents: Numrerade handlingar 1052.2.

The first nine pages of Carling's notebook contain drafts of the *Calculation öfver Krieg* ('The Calculations on War'), with detailed information about the formation of a possible fighting force and its cost that, under the leadership of Charles XII, could be used as leverage in the political power game. The compilation of Swedish troops and potential mercenaries gives the impression that the king dictated this wish list.

The first words in the dictionary contain the statement that, because both the Ottoman Empire and Sweden were defeated by Christians, both countries should seek support from other oriental powers.

First, the forces of countries bordering the Ottoman Empire: the king in Persia, the so-called *Hispanan Padis hah*, 50,000 men of the *Stora Mongol* (Great Mongol), and 400,000 men of the *Indianiske stamm* (Indian tribe).¹¹ The author means that these countries perceive Russia as very capable of war, so in other words, a perilous enemy.

Moreover, Carling counts 100,000 men under a word *Zillkowet*,¹² to which he added forces used in sieges at *Jassi*,¹³ along with *Aprocher ock i Rattlier*, i.e. the Turkish cavalry and infantry stationed, like the Tatars, across the Ottoman Empire. In all, he suggests that the Ottomans and their allies can form a huge army.

He also lists the cavalry *Kristnas Liv Drabanter*, who are to be paid daily with 1. *Slota*¹⁴ or with 2. *Caroliner*.¹⁵ And then he, or perhaps Charles XII, lists more of the intended military reinforcements as *Anadol Spahasi* (Anatolian Cavalry), Cavalry of *Bossna/Bosnien*, and Cavalry of *Macedonien* called *Arnaut Spahasi* or *Romuli* (Horsemen from Albania or Rum, i.e. European Turkey.) The wish-list continues. Turkmens with their beautiful horses, the Egyptian Cavalry regiment called *Missirle Spahasi*,¹⁶ and the Egyptian Infantry called *Missirle jajan*. After adding *Tartar Cham* and the Tatars,¹⁷ Carling comes up with an impressive number of some 533,000 warriors, who could be mobilised against Peter I.

Interestingly, he adds that he believes that some troops, such as those stationed in *Constantinopel Eski Jenizieri*,¹⁸ do not need to be paid, as they receive 10 para per day from the sultan. The list of units goes on to include artillery drivers (*arabatski*), miners (*lagumtschi*), constables (non-commissioned officers in the artillery), assistant officers, and their camp-follower women (*markietan qvinnor*).

¹¹ It is not yet clear what exactly Carling had in mind.

¹² From Ottoman-Turkish *توقلا* 'powerful, mighty.' My gratitude to Anna Krasnowolska for pointing out the correct interpretation of this word. I would like to express my gratitude to Karin Borgkvist Ljung, Peter Nordström, and Göran Bäärnhjelm, who have supported me in deciphering Carling's handwritten text from the 18th century. The spelling of the same word varies, and some pages are illegible. However, any misinterpretations are mine.

¹³ Jassy (Iași), the county capital in present-day Romania, where part of the Bendery Dragoons was stationed.

¹⁴ < slota > *zolota* 'Thalerus Hollandicus, floreno Rhenensi aequivalens', according to the dictionary *Thesaurus linguarum orientalium turcicae, arabicae, persicae* of Francisci à Mesgnien Meninski (1680).

¹⁵ Means of payment, one *carolin* during the time of Charles XII was equivalent to 2 marks in minted silver coins.

¹⁶ Horsemen from Egypt.

¹⁷ Tatar Khan.

¹⁸ *Yeniçeri* in Swedish. Janissaries, the sultan's bodyguard, until 1638, were forcibly recruited from the Christian population.

Carling omits, for some political reasons, the probable contingent of the Polish army. Leszczyński, who was placed on the Polish throne by Charles XII, spent a year in Bender proposing an alliance with his rival, August II, to Charles XII, ready to give up the throne in the name of a joint fight against the common enemy, Russia. It appears that the Swedish king did not support this plan, as he did not even receive Leszczyński in an audience (Kowalik 1973: 112–160).

These extracts from the notes, presented here, provide a detailed picture of the ambitious plans that would require large sums of money to recruit, uniform, and supply these troops with cannons, shells, and transport. If everything were to go according to these plans, and one were to add the sultan's troops, Carling estimates a total of about 1,360,000 men in the king's fighting force [sic].

The Sublime Porte granted the Swedish king a daily allowance of 414½ piasters (Refik 1922: 32)¹⁹ and his crew all possible benefits, including maintenance in kind, the so-called *tain*.²⁰ This money would not be enough to realize Charles XII's grand plans, so later large sums were consequently borrowed from numerous creditors by royal order for *aflöning och fältraktamente*,²¹ later making *Riksrådet* (The National Council) unwilling to finance the king's war further.

Carling's cost estimate was probably written before December 1711, at least before Charles XII could have learned that the Ottoman Empire had signed a peace treaty with Peter I (the Peace of Pruth, 22 July 1711) and had chosen a new direction in foreign policy. Still, the exact timing is impossible to determine. Both Charles XII and the Sublime Porte wanted to postpone the decision on the king's return to Sweden, since the king's presence in Ottoman territory had a strengthening effect during the negotiations with Russia. Thus, Swedish planning for war was allowed to continue to the year 1713.

Directly after the page headed *Tursk Dictionair*, the reader will find the honorifics in Latin and Turkish that were used in correspondence with the then ally, the Tatar Khan Kaplan I Girey: *Tartar Haahns Titul in Latin, Serenissimo ac Potentissimo Kaplan Gierei Tartarous, Crimensium, Perecopensium, Nahaiensium, Bialohorodensium Budziacensium Magno Hano, Domino, Domino Clementissimo A: 1714*. In addition, Carling quotes a kind of *laudation* to *Osman Paschaner Turkey* in verse, in the Turkish language of the time, though not correctly rendered. Osman Pasha was an Ottoman governor of Bosnia who sympathized with Charles XII's anti-Russian plan,²² mentioning Agha Yusuf Pasha.²³

¹⁹ *Piaster*, or *kuruş*, were silver coins worth 40 *para*, or 18,6 Swedish öre.

²⁰ *Ta'in*, a daily allowance given to all official diplomats visiting the Ottoman Empire (Munthe 1935: 201–231).

²¹ 'pay and field allowance' (Refik 1922).

²² Probably later, Grand Vizier Topal Osman Pasha (1663–1733). Carling writes about potential allies, stating that one can count on the Cavalry's future *Bossnien*.

²³ Ağa Yusuf Pasha (Yusuf Pasha the Agha), also known as Gürcü Yusuf Pasha (Yusuf Pasha the Georgian), was an 18th-century Ottoman military leader and Grand vizier. Yusuf Pasha was of Georgian origin. In 1710, he was appointed Agha of the Janissaries, commander of the Janissary corps.



Figure 2. The title page from Carling's dictionary
(Photo: National Library of Sweden)

During the exhausting retreat from the overwhelming defeat at Poltava, Charles XII's army discovered how difficult it was to cope without knowledge of local languages. The lack of possibility of communicating with local people was both a practical disadvantage and demoralizing (Widegren 2024: 35–36).

By the time the Swedish army reached Bender, they well-knew that knowledge of Turkish would be needed on-site at the camp to manage daily contacts and communicate with the envoys of potential allies. It was a well-established opinion that *dragomans*, i.e. Ottoman interpreters, could not be trusted.²⁴ The distrust of local interpreters and the desire to be able, at least to some extent, to control the translations, could be one of the reasons why Carling decided, or was ordered by the king, to compile a Swedish-Turkish dictionary.

On the pages of the dictionary where the reader finds an inventory of potential fighting forces and the estimated costs, individual Turkish words emerge, such as *atli* ('cavalry'), *yaymaklere* ('infantry'), *kale bekleren* ('permanent fortress garrison'), *Böylük Spahasi* ('cavalry corps, later cavalry division'), *arabatski* ('artillery drivers'), etc.

The following part of Carling's notes consists of *Turkiska Galanterier* ('Turkish Courtesy phrases'). These short rhyming phrases could be uttered when it was necessary to initiate acquaintance, and following the Turkish *savoir vivre*, to begin contacts which were not necessarily professional. These typical rhythmic motifs of folk poetry are composed in syllabic metres, as a playful interplay between sounds, words, and images. In seven pages preceding the proper dictionary, Carling presented 54 such poetic *stanzas*.

Diplomat Gustav Celsing the Elder and one of his two sons, or a combination thereof,²⁵ later noted a whole 74 poetic *stanzas* in a draft for their own separate dictionary. Gustav Celsing the Elder was one of Charles XII's envoys to the Sublime Porte, and in all probability knew Petter Carling.²⁶ Gustav the Elder and his sons Gustav the Younger (1723–1789) and Ulric (1731–1805) were all Swedish diplomats in Constantinople at different times. They showed a genuine interest in the Turkish language and culture. They collected Turkish art and left behind three drafts of Turkish-Swedish dictionaries. Gustav the Elder Celsing was also the author of one

²⁴ 'The quality of the dragomans [who are] subjects of this Empire is such that having to depend in their jobs and in their everyday lives on those who have tyrannical authority [over them], they often adapt their interpretations more to the avarice and arrogance of the Turks than to the reputation and benefit of the affairs of [Venice], which creates indignity and burdens for the [ambassadors and *baili*] who cannot trust their translations.' There was a widespread opinion that they had poor qualifications and a tendency to serve various masters simultaneously. Some of the dragomans were competent, but the fear of authority caused a selective translation of the words of foreign diplomats (Dursteler 2006: 37). See also Lewis (2004: 31–32); Durban (2015: 107–128).

²⁵ Their intellectual heritage has not yet been sufficiently explored. It has not yet been investigated who participated in creating the dictionaries and to what extent (Świącicka 2015: 341–353).

²⁶ According to his own diary, Gustaf Celsing arrived in Bender in June 1709 and, on 28 August, set off for Constantinople on the king's orders. The diary also contains notes concerning diplomatic events and missions (Palm 1932–1933: 51–127; Świącicka 2015: 341–353).

of these dictionaries, once kept in the family archives at Biby, the family estate in Södermanland, and now at the National Archives.

Tell (Tel) [Thread]
Bir gedziä
Bise gel
 (Bir gece bize gel)
 [Come to me one night]

Celsing has noted a more extended version of the same *stanza*:

Tel
Bir gitscha bize gell,
Gonglymi ele al,
Bir gitsche bize kal.
 (Bir gece bize gel, gönlümü ele al
 Bir gece bize kal)
 [Come to me one night
 Take my heart,
 Stay with me one night]

Mersin [Myrten]²⁷

Allah seni
Bana wersin
 (Allah seni
 Bana versin)
 [May Allah give you to me]

Schinschir [Boxwood]²⁸

Acklin
Baschima
Dewischir
 (Şimşir aklın
 Başırma
 Devşir)
 [Your state of mind confused me]

²⁷ The myrtle plant is associated with Demeter, Aphrodite, and Venus, and it is a symbol of love and the Hebrew symbol of marriage.

²⁸ Boxwood was probably then and now a symbol of loyalty and class.

Tachta [Throne]

Seni görmeli

Olde bir hafta

(Tahta

Seni görmeli

Bir hafta oldu)

[I have to see you. A week has gone by...]

Gun [Today]

Cande idin

Dun

(Gün

kande idin

Dün)

[Yesterday, you were on fire!]

Even at first glance, one can see that Carling noted words that he thought were helpful in everyday life at the camp near Bender.²⁹

Carling presented his approximately 1000 entries, for the most part in alphabetical order.

Arbete	< <i>isch</i> > ‘iş’ [work] ³⁰
Altar	< <i>minrab</i> > ‘mihrab’ ³¹ [altar]
Adelsman	< <i>beg</i> >, < <i>schadeli</i> > ‘beg, şadeli’ [nobleman]

And eleven keywords later:

Adel	< <i>assel zadelik</i> > ‘asıl zadelik’ [nobility]
------	--

Sometimes Carling sorts the words thematically according to the principle of association:

Bröd	< <i>äkmäk</i> > (ekmek) [bread]
Bagare	< <i>äkmäktsihi</i> > (ekmekçi) [baker]
Blod	< <i>kahn</i> > (kan) [[blood]
blöda	< <i>kan akmak</i> > [to bleed] (written with the modern spelling variant)

²⁹ Compiling Carling’s interesting notes, especially the dictionary, seems very desirable in the future.

³⁰ Carling’s entry in translation to English, rendered in [].

³¹ A niche in a mosque that faces the Kaaba in Mecca and indicates the direction of prayer.

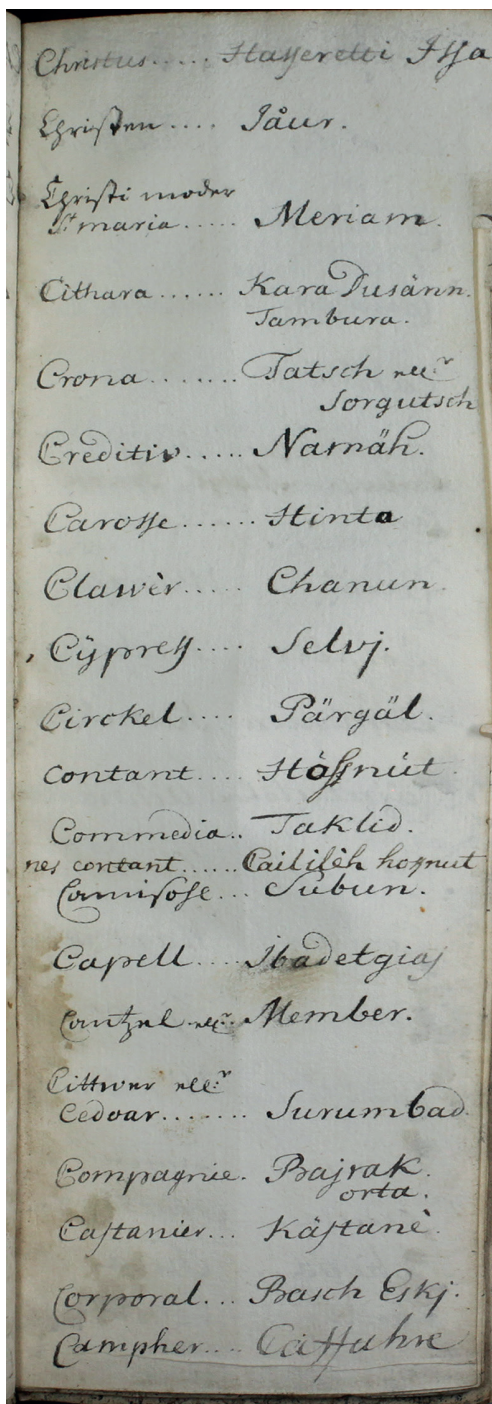


Figure 3. A page from Carling's dictionary
(Photo: National Library of Sweden)

Carling collects words that may have practical meanings, such as weather and militaria, and those related to Ottoman Muslim culture. He notes annual holidays such as *Ramasahn Bajram* and *Kurbahm Bajram*, and *Kurbahm Bajram*. His dictionary contains several terms related to both Islam and Christianity:

A Dieu	< <i>doalar</i> > (dualar) [to God] (<i>verbatim</i> [prayers])
Güd	< Allah >, < Jarabin >, < Tangreè > (Allah, Ya Rabbi, Tanrı) [God]
Bibel	< Teurat > ‘Tevrat’ (Tora) [Bible]
Christus	< Hayretti Is[a] > (Hayret-i Isa) [Christ]
Christen	< Gâur > (gâvur) [vulg. Infidel, non-Muslim]
Christi Moder,	
St. Maria	< Meriam > (Meryem Ana) [Mary, Miriam]

Sometimes, his explanations are incorrect, like the one about counting time: *Turkarnes åhrstal innevarande åhr 1713 blef 1125 sedan deras Mahomet blef död.*³²

Listed words could be linked to the military camp, diplomacy, war, weapons, religion, food, drink and social life. They could also relate to socializing with women,³³ easily meeting the criteria of a true ‘flesh and blood dictionary’.

The future analysis of all the entries in Carling’s dictionary will probably confirm that we will find all 55 universal, conceptual, semantic primes and lexical universals according to the semantic theory created by Wierzbicka and her co-researchers.³⁴ Wierzbicka proves to be valid that Leibniz’s assumption that if something does not exist as a self-understood entity, then it would be impossible to include it in a dictionary.³⁵

Interesting lexical material can also be excerpted from the memoirs of Sven Agrell, a field priest who accompanied Charles XII in 1707–1713.³⁶

Abgesant	< ältschi > (elçi) [envoy, ambassador]
Batttaile	< Dziängk > (cenk) [fight, combat]
Corporal	< Basch Eski > (başeski) [Janissary petty officer]
Bly	< kursium > (kurşun) [lead, bullet]

³² ‘The Turks’ number of years, the current year 1713, became 1125 since their Mahomet died.’ Mahomet died in 632, not 588. The Islamic calendar begins on the day and year that Muhammad left Mecca for Medina. According to the Gregorian calendar, this was in 622 AD.

³³ Munthe (1935: 201–231) describes the expenses of Charles XII and his officers for extraordinary food and lavish gifts; however, it was not the responsibility of Field Commissioner Carling to account for them, but of his boss, the War Commissioner. Almost all ‘Turkish courtesy phrases’ are about emotions and erotic contact. For more on Constantinople as a place of freedom from Western European sexual conformity, see Mansel (1995: 176).

³⁴ Wierzbicka 1996: 35–111.

³⁵ Wierzbicka 2006: 29.

³⁶ Widegren 2024. Widegren’s work on contacts between the Swedes in Bender and the local population comprehensively discusses Agrell’s field diaries.

Betzel	< uŷem >, < baschlek >, < kanterma >, (<i>unknown equivalent</i> , başlık, kantarma) [spurred bit for a horse]
Appetit	< ästaim >, < jsteh > (iştah) [appetite, desire]
Aftonmåltid	< aksiam taam > (akşam taam) [evening meal]
Aprikoser	< serdale kajasi > (zerdali, kayısı) [wild apricot, apricot]
Anis	< anason > (anason) [anise]
Åhl	< jlan balek > (yılan balığı) [eel]
Bränwin	< rakia > (rakı) [raki]
Arsenicum	< Kisin otti bejas > (kızın otı beyaz?) [arsenic]
Gumma	< Aurat > (avrat) [woman]
Älskar dü	< Sewer ŷen > (sever sen) [do you love]
Att avkläda	< esbabun brak/soinumak > (esvabın brak/soyunmak) [to undress]
Bröst	< göide > < mämäh > ‘ (gövde, meme) [breast generally or a female breast]
Atlast	< attlas > (atlas) [satin]

The notes on the pronunciation of Turkish words in these poems and dictionary entries are interesting from a linguistic point of view. Turkish words and phrases are written in the Latin alphabet with Swedish spelling. Carling created his transcription system by trying different ways of spelling, e.g. åhr (år) < gihl/ihl > in modern spelling ‘yıl’ [year]. Swedish orthography was not established then, but Carling skilfully found the equivalent of Turkish phonemes. For example, he wrote two consonants next to each other in order NOT to pronounce a single Swedish vowel as a long vowel: Swedish word ‘ask’ meaning a box, in Turkish ‘kutu’ in his spelling < kuttu > (kutu), reflects Turkish pronunciation accurately.

As I previously pointed out, Carling’s dictionary belongs to an important category of texts called transcription texts, meaning that they are written in alphabets other than Arabic.³⁷ Until the alphabetic reform of 1928, the Ottoman-Turkish language used the Arabic script based on consonants. Thanks to texts written with scripts written by non-Turks in Latin, Cyrillic, Armenian, and other alphabets containing vowels, we are able to reconstruct historical phonetics, phonology, and the morphophonology of the Turkish language. They are also significant for lexicological studies.

Carling probably had access to contemporary dictionaries that translated other European languages with Turkish, although the composition of his *Turkish Dictionary* and the arrangement of the entries seem to be his own.

³⁷ Other noteworthy texts encompass a variety of genres, including grammars, vocabularies, phrasebooks, and translations of religious texts. Most often, they attest to the different Turkish dialects spoken throughout the former provinces of the Ottoman Empire. Their authors, who were usually not native Turkish speakers, have attempted to capture the phonetic shape of the language as they perceived it. The Arabic alphabet was used by Turks until 1928.

The instruction for the creation of the dictionary may have been given directly from Charles XII to Carling, but it is likely he would have been able to count on the help of other educated people who stayed in the Bender camp. Foremost is the king's interpreter, the Greek *dragoman* Amira.³⁸ He was possibly Carling's teacher, and if this was the case, it might explain why Carling presents the Greek alphabet with additions at the beginning of the dictionary.³⁹ Additionally, the Royal Chamberlain, Carsten Klingenstierna, who died in Bender in 1713, was recognised for his language skills and knew Turkish, as it is likely did the legation priest in Varnitsa, Magnus Aurivillius. And there were other interpreters in the camp, including Jean-Baptiste Savary as a person who redeemed three Swedish slave girls and took them to Demotika.⁴⁰

It is perhaps no coincidence that the Swedish scholar and interpreter, Carl Aurivillius (1717–1786), with the same name as the previously mentioned clergyman residing in Bender, donated a copy of the Italian-Turkish dictionary of Giovanni Molino, published in 1641 to the Uppsala Library Carolina Rediviva (Świącicka 2020). Perhaps this same copy could have served his relative, Carsten in Bender, and could also have been used by Carling, who knew Italian to some extent. At the end of his dictionary, he included several pages of Italian-Turkish conversations, conversational phrases and dialogues, and *Observationi* (Observations), which provide a kind of statement about the Italian orthography for the notation of the Turkish sounds.⁴¹

Charles XII's forced stay in Ottoman Turkey had significant cultural and scientific consequences on Swedish thinking. Charles XII was accompanied by Carolinian officers and scholars, most of whom were clergy, as was common at the time. They devoted themselves to research and study. In 1710, the king sent three officers to the Orient on expeditions to explore the Holy Land and Egypt and copy landscapes and monuments (Ådahl 2015: 158–185).

Thus, the texts written by the Celsings enrich the collection of transcription texts written in the Latin script with a new variant—transcription texts based on Swedish characters. Carling's *Tursk Dictionair* further enriches this collection for much the same reason.

³⁸ *Storia del soggiorno di Carlo XII in Turchia, scritta dal suo primo interprete Alessandro Amira*, e pubblicata da N. Iorga. *Historiska Handlingar* 19, appendix, 55–56, after Karlsson (1973); Tengberg (1953: 161–167); Amira's ancestry may explain why Carling presents the Greek names of numerals and names of months at the beginning of the dictionary. Amira was ordered to leave the king after the Sultan's decision to deport Charles XII.

³⁹ Carling also includes *Turckisk alphabeth* correctly rendered in Arabic letters at the end of the Dictionary.

⁴⁰ Dragomans in Bender are on Carling's payroll. Calculation, Benderska Dragomanerne, in *Likvidationer. Stora Nordiska kriget. 2. Avräkningskontoret*. Nr 3683; Widegren (2024: 24); Savary is mentioned in the biography of Johan Eriksson Ehrenskiöld, cavalry officer who tirelessly strive for loans for Charles XII ('Johan Eriksson Ehrenskiöld'. *Svenskt biografiskt lexikon*. Accessed 1 October 2025. <https://sok.riksarkivet.se/sbl/artikel/16700>).

⁴¹ There is still a lot of Carling's dictionary left to describe, such as conversations between fictional characters and grammatical sketches about the Turkish verb structure. I hope that the historical and linguistic material will be the subject of careful study in the future.

Carling did eventually return to Sweden, but the Great Power era was over, and times were difficult. By 1728, we know that Carling could no longer call himself *Holmensis*, i.e. Stockholmer, since he asked the Royal Chamber Collegium to receive the remaining *tractamentum*, as provincial inspector in Nyköping. By all accounts, he did not receive a positive response. He was also rejected on a new application to ‘the Estates of the State to be granted liquidation and payment for his salary claims with the Royal Majesty, and the Crown from the year 1709, when he as War Commissioner was to be taken to Russian captivity, to the year 1719, when he received his farewell after many hardships’. There was no money for the military of the Great Power era: ‘The deputation from the Chamber-Collegium [...] has not been found, that Commissioner Carling is entitled to any salary liquidation’.⁴²

However, Carling did not give up and, in 1735, wrote a summary of his military deeds, entitled Memorial. He requested compensation for ‘34 years of service to the Royal Majesty and the Crown, and the many adventures he endured, difficult captivity and now later hardship and poverty’. This time his request was granted, and in 1739, Carling was given an annual salary of 50 daler.⁴³

In the sweep of history, there seems some justice in that small stipend. We can say that Petter Carling was much more than a military man returning from a failed campaign. From the records of the age, we know that he was also the author of an early Swedish-Turkish dictionary from which linguists, and historians continue to draw from today.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Hugo Widegren for his technical review and insightful suggestions, which significantly enhanced the clarity of my article. I would also like to include my warm thanks to David Williams for proofreading the article.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

ORCID

Elżbieta Świąćicka  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7670-8054>

⁴² *Sveriges Ridderskaps och Adels Riksdags-Protokoll, nionde delen 1738–1739* (1887: 249).

⁴³ ‘[...] upplästes Secrete Utskottets Extractum Protocolli angående Krigs-Commissarien Carlings dit remitterade ansökning att i stället för liquidation öfver des innestående lönings-fordringar antingen undfå en discretion eller tilräckelig årlig expectance-lön utur Ständernes Contoir; hållandes Secrete Utskottet före at, i anseende til Krigs-Commissariens i länglig tid med godt loford gjorde tienster, des urståndne fångenskaper och åtskillige genomgångne svårigheter, honom kunde i Riksens Ständers Contoir tilläggas 50 dal. smt årlig expectance-lön’ (*Sveriges Ridderskaps och Adels Riksdags-Protokoll från och med år 1719, Elfte delen 1738–1739*. 1887: 171).

References

- Ådahl, Karin. 2015. 'Expeditionerna till Orienten' ['The Expeditions to the Orient']. In *Karl XII och svenskarna i Osmanska riket* [*Charles XII and the Swedes in the Ottoman Empire*], edited by Åsa Karlsson, Klas Kronberg, and Per Sandin, 158–185. Stockholm: Atlantis.
- Djurberg, Vilhelm. 1913. 'Om regementsfältskären Melchior Neuman och Karl XII:s blesyrer' ['About Regimental Field Surgeon Melchior Neuman and the Wounds of Charles XII']. *Karolinska förbundets årsbok* (KFÅ) 1913: 105–106.
- Dursteler, Eric R. 2006. *Venetians in Constantinople: Nation, Identity, and Coexistence in the Early Modern Mediterranean*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Ericson Wolke, Lars. 2015. 'Det storpolitiska spelet mellan Sverige, Ryssland och Höga porten' ['The Great Power Game between Sweden, Russia, and the Sublime Porte']. In *Karl XII och svenskarna i Osmanska riket* [*Charles XII and the Swedes in the Ottoman Empire*], edited by Åsa Karlsson, Klas Kronberg, and Per Sandin, 20–43. Stockholm: Atlantis.
- Gouridis, Athanassios I., and Per Sandin. 2015. 'Karl XII i Demotika och Timurtasch' ['Charles XII in Demotika and Timurtasch']. In *Karl XII och svenskarna i Osmanska riket* [*Charles XII and the Swedes in the Ottoman Empire*], edited by Åsa Karlsson, Klas Kronberg, and Per Sandin, 122–141. Stockholm: Atlantis.
- Gurkan, Emrah S. 2015. 'Mediating Boundaries: Mediterranean Go-Betweens and Cross-Confessional Diplomacy in Constantinople, 1560–1600'. *Journal of Modern History* 19: 107–128.
- Karlsson, Gustav H. 1973. 'Kring kalabaliken i Bender' ['About the Skirmish in Bender']. *Karolinska förbundets årsbok* 1973: 29–62.
- Karlsson, Åsa, Klas Kronberg, and Per Sandin, eds. *Karl XII och svenskarna i Osmanska riket* [*Charles XII and the Swedes in the Ottoman Empire*]. Stockholm: Atlantis.
- Kronberg, Klas, Per Sandin, and Åsa Karlsson, eds. 2016. *When Sweden Was Ruled from the Ottoman Empire*. Stockholm: Armémuseum.
- Kowalik, Janina. 1973. 'Stanisław Leszczyński i Sverige' ['Stanislaw Leszczyński in Sweden']. *Karolinska förbundets årsbok* 1973: 112–160.
- Larsson, Olle. 2009. *Stormaktens sista krig: Sverige och stora nordiska kriget 1700–1721* [*The Great Power's Last War: Sweden and the Great Nordic War, 1700–1721*]. Lund: Historiska media.
- Lewis, Bernard. 2004. *From Babel to Dragomans: Interpreting the Middle East*. London: Orion Books Ltd.
- Likvidationer. Stora Nordiska kriget. 2. Avräkningskontoret*. Nr 3683. Stockholm: Swedish National Archives (Riksarkivet).
- Liljegren, Bengt. 2015. 'Kalabaliken i Varnitsa' ['The Skirmish in Varnitsa']. In *Karl XII och svenskarna i Osmanska riket* [*Charles XII and the Swedes in the Ottoman Empire*], edited by Åsa Karlsson, Klas Kronberg, and Per Sandin, 88–105. Stockholm: Atlantis.
- Mansel, Philip. 1995. *Constantinople: City of the World's Desire, 1453–1924*. London: Penguin Books.
- Munthe, Arne. 1935. 'Karl XII i Turkiet. Några bidrag ur generalkrigskommissariatets räkenskaper' ['Charles XII in Turkey: Some Contributions from the Accounts of the General War Commissariat']. *Karolinska förbundets årsbok* 1935: 201–231.
- Palm, Thede. 1932–1933. 'Gustaf Celsings dagbok' ['Gustaf Celsing's Diary']. *Karolinska förbundets årsbok* 1932–1933: 51–127.
- Refik, Ahmet. 1922. 'Karl Järnhuvud i Turkiet' ['Charles Ironhead in Turkey']. Translated from Turkish by Karl Wilhelm Zetterstéen. *Le Monde Oriental* 16: 1–160.
- Rosén, Jerker. 1938. 'Från Poltava till Fredrikshald' ['From Poltava to Timurtasch']. *Den svenska historien* 8: 58.

- Sandin, Per. 2015. 'Karl XII i Demotika och Timurtasch' ['Charles XII in Demotika and Timurtasch']. In *Karl XII och svenskarna i Osmanska riket* [*Charles XII and the Swedes in the Ottoman Empire*], edited by Åsa Karlsson, Klas Kronberg, and Per Sandin, 88–105. Stockholm: Atlantis.
- Savchuk, Yuri. 2015. 'Den svensk-ukrainska alliansen' ['Charles XII and the Swedes in the Ottoman Empire']. In *Karl XII och svenskarna i Osmanska riket* [*Charles XII and the Swedes in the Ottoman Empire*], edited by Åsa Karlsson, Klas Kronberg, and Per Sandin, 240–269. Stockholm: Atlantis.
- Stille, Arthur. 1918. 'Karl XII och Porten 1709–1714' ['Charles XII and the Sublime Porte']. In *Karl XII : till 200-årsdagen av hans död* [*Charles XII: On the 200th Anniversary of His Death*], edited by Samuel E. Bring, 339–412. Stockholm: Norstedt.
- Sveriges Ridderskaps och Adels Riksdags-Protokoll, nionde delen 1738–1739*. Stockholm: National Library of Sweden.
- Sveriges Ridderskaps och Adels Riksdags-Protokoll från och med år 1719, Elfte delen 1738–1739*. 13 mars 1739. Stockholm: National Library of Sweden.
- Święcicka, Elżbieta. 1997. 'Den diplomatiska trafiken mellan Sverige, Tatariet och Osmanska riket, från Gustav Vasas tid till Karl XII' ['The Diplomatic Traffic between Sweden, Tataria and the Ottoman Empire, from the Time of Gustav Vasa to Charles XII']. In *Den nordiska mosaiken: språk- och kulturmöten i gammal tid och i våra dagar: Humanistdagarna vid Uppsala universitet 1997*, edited by Rut Boström Andersson, 291–305. Uppsala: Uppsala universitet.
- Święcicka, Elżbieta. 2002. 'The Diplomatic Letters by Crimean Keräy Ladies to the Swedish Royal House'. *Rocznik Orientalistyczny* 55 (1): 57–90.
- Święcicka, Elżbieta. 2015. 'Preliminary Notes on Linguistic Documents from the von Celsings' Eighteenth-Century Ottoman Collection'. In *Words and Dictionaries: A Festschrift for Professor Stanisław Stachowski on the Occasion of His 85th Birthday*, edited by Elżbieta Mańczak-Wohlfeld and Barbara Podolak, 341–353. Kraków: Jagiellonian University Press.
- Święcicka, Elżbieta. 2020. *Dictionary of Italian-Turkish Language (1641) by Giovanni Molino: Transcribed, Reversed, and Annotated*. Edited by Elżbieta Święcicka. Studien zur Sprache, Geschichte und Kultur der Turkvölker 23. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.
- Tengberg, Eric. 1953. *Från Poltava till Bender. En studie i Karl XII:s turkiska politik 1709–1713*. Lund: Carl Bloms Boktryckeri.
- Tursk Dictionair skrifwin vid af P. Carling, Holmensis in Suecia*. Petter Carling. Strängnäs: Rogge Library, National Library of Sweden.
- Widegren, Hugo. 2024. 'The Friendly Turk: Perceptions of the Ottoman Empire by Swedes in Bender during the Great Northern War'. MA Thesis, Stockholm: Stockholm University.
- Wierzbicka, Anna. 1996. 'A Survey of Semantic Primitives'. In *Semantics: Primes and Universals*, edited by Anna Wierzbicka, 35–111. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Wierzbicka, Anna. 2006. *Meaning and Culture*. Oxford: University Press.
- Wikander, Johan G. 1922. *Översikt över Sveriges Krig under 1700-talet*. Stockholm: Militärlitteraturföreningens Förlag.
- Zetterstéen, Karl Wilhelm. 1952. 'De krimiska tatarernas diplomatiska korrespondens med den svenske regeringen' ['The Diplomatic Correspondence of the Crimean Tatars with the Swedish Government']. *Kungl. Humanistiska Vetenskaps-Samfundet i Uppsala Årsbok* 1952: 7–16.