**MAHMUD AL-KASHGARI AND HIS CONTRIBUTION TO TURKIC LEXICOGRAPHY**

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Mahmud al-Kashgari, a distinguished scholar of the 11th century, is celebrated as one of the most important figures in Turkic linguistics and cultural history. Born in Kashgar, a prominent city in the modern Xinjiang region of China, he belonged to a noble family of the Karakhanid dynasty, which ruled significant portions of Central Asia. His remarkable work, *Dīwān Lughāt al-Turk* (*Compendium of the Languages of the Turks*), is not only a linguistic masterpiece but also a vital source for understanding the history, culture, and geography of the Turkic-speaking peoples of the medieval period.

The 11th century was a period of immense cultural and political change in the Turkic world. The rise of the Seljuk Empire had brought Turkic peoples into closer contact with the Islamic world, influencing their language, religion, and culture. The Turkic tribes were transitioning from a nomadic lifestyle to more settled forms of governance and economy, integrating with the Islamic civilization. In this milieu, Mahmud al-Kashgari’s work served as a bridge between the Turkic and Islamic traditions, documenting the Turkic languages and promoting their richness and utility to the broader Islamic scholarly community.

Mahmud undertook extensive travels across the Turkic world, interacting with diverse tribes and dialects. His work reflects a profound understanding of the Turkic linguistic landscape, ranging from the Oghuz and Kipchak to the Uyghur and Karluk dialects. These efforts culminated in the creation of *Dīwān Lughāt al-Turk*, completed around 1074.

The *Dīwān Lughāt al-Turk* is a monumental lexicon and ethnographic encyclopedia of the Turkic languages. Written in Arabic, the lingua franca of Islamic scholarship at the time, the work was intended for an educated Arab audience, particularly scholars and administrators of the Abbasid Caliphate. Mahmud’s primary aim was to showcase the richness of the Turkic languages and their suitability for scholarly, poetic, and administrative purposes.

The *Dīwān* is organized alphabetically by root letters, following the traditional Arabic lexicographical style. It contains over 8,000 entries, including words, phrases, and idiomatic expressions from various Turkic dialects. Each entry is accompanied by explanations in Arabic, often supplemented by example sentences, proverbs, and verses of Turkic poetry. These examples not only elucidate the meanings of words but also provide valuable insights into the oral traditions, folklore, and cultural values of the Turkic peoples.

One of the most remarkable features of the *Dīwān* is its inclusion of a detailed map, often considered the earliest known map of the Turkic-speaking world. This map illustrates the geographical distribution of Turkic tribes and their proximity to other regions, demonstrating Mahmud’s keen interest in geography and ethnography.

Mahmud al-Kashgari’s work goes beyond mere lexicography. It offers a window into the linguistic diversity of the Turkic world and the dynamics of language contact and change. The *Dīwān* highlights the influence of Arabic and Persian on Turkic languages, reflecting the broader cultural exchanges of the Islamic Golden Age. At the same time, it underscores the uniqueness of Turkic linguistic structures, such as vowel harmony and agglutination, which distinguish them from Semitic and Indo-European languages.

The proverbs and poetic verses in the *Dīwān* are particularly valuable for understanding the worldview and ethos of the Turkic peoples. For example, many proverbs emphasize themes of honor, bravery, and hospitality, which were central to the nomadic lifestyle. The poetry, often composed in syllabic meters, reveals the aesthetic preferences and oral traditions of the Turkic tribes.

One of Mahmud al-Kashgari’s underlying motivations was to elevate the status of the Turkic languages within the Islamic world. By presenting them as rich and expressive linguistic systems, he challenged the prevailing perception of Arabic as the sole language of high culture and scholarship. His work implicitly advocates for the recognition of Turkic contributions to Islamic civilization, fostering a sense of pride and identity among Turkic-speaking communities.

The *Dīwān Lughāt al-Turk* has had a lasting impact on the study of Turkic languages and cultures. Rediscovered in the Ottoman period, the work was first printed in 1915, marking the beginning of its modern scholarly reception. Today, it is regarded as a foundational text in Turkology, the academic study of Turkic languages, history, and culture.

Modern linguists and historians continue to rely on the *Dīwān* for its unparalleled documentation of medieval Turkic dialects. The work provides a baseline for tracing the evolution of these languages and their relationships to one another. It also sheds light on the historical migrations and interactions of Turkic peoples, contributing to our understanding of Central Asian history.

In addition to its academic value, the *Dīwān* holds cultural and symbolic significance for Turkic-speaking nations. It is celebrated as a testament to the intellectual achievements of their ancestors and a source of inspiration for preserving and revitalizing their linguistic heritage. For example, efforts to promote the use of Turkic languages in education, media, and literature often draw on the legacy of Mahmud al-Kashgari and his work.

Mahmud al-Kashgari’s *Dīwān Lughāt al-Turk* stands as a timeless masterpiece that bridges languages, cultures, and eras. It is a testament to the richness and diversity of the Turkic linguistic and cultural heritage, as well as a reflection of the intellectual vibrancy of the Islamic Golden Age. Through his meticulous documentation and insightful commentary, Mahmud not only preserved the linguistic traditions of the Turkic peoples but also affirmed their place in the broader tapestry of human civilization. His work continues to inspire scholars and cultural enthusiasts alike, reminding us of the enduring power of language as a vehicle for understanding and connection.