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AN EVALUATION OF THREE OTTOMAN STONE INSCRIPTIONS IN THE NATIONAL MUSEUM IN CRACOW

This article is the first attempt to translate and interpret the three stone inscriptions (*kitabe*) found in the National Museum of Cracow. From a technical and literary perspective, they are crucial for the confirmation of the long historical presence of Turkic texts in Poland and they exhibit important historical and artistic values of Ottoman culture.

Kitabe is an inscription chiselled in stone, marble or any other hard material designed to commemorate a person or an event. Ottoman inscriptions were placed, for example, on graves, on the walls of mosques, forts and schools. Inscriptions constituted an intricate element of the life and culture of the Ottoman Turks and have their origin in Islamic art. They represent an art form which results from the interaction of four separate creative crafts: literature, art, history and aesthetics. An inscription is the joint work of four individuals. These are: a master stonemason, a master of carved inscription lettering (*hattat*), a master of ornamentation adorning the inscription (*nakkas*) and a poet – the author of the text. The joint aim, to which the individuals involved in the creative process devote themselves, is to immortalize the place or event mentioned in the text. These inscriptions bear witness to the continuity of culture.

Two of the three stone inscriptions written in the Ottoman language and exhibited in the National Museum in Cracow are among the most important Turkic monuments in Poland, one being in *talik*, and the second in the *sülüs* style. The dimensions of these inscriptions are 134 x 85, 150 x 95 and 134 x 101 cm. These monuments were brought from Hungary to Poland

by Stanisław Filip Rusiecki¹, an art collector, and donated to the National Museum in 1910 with the registration number MNK-W-WYS- 2063/1ab, 2063/2.

There is no written information stating how these inscriptions were transferred to Poland. The museum staff confirm that they do not have any written or oral information concerning the said event.

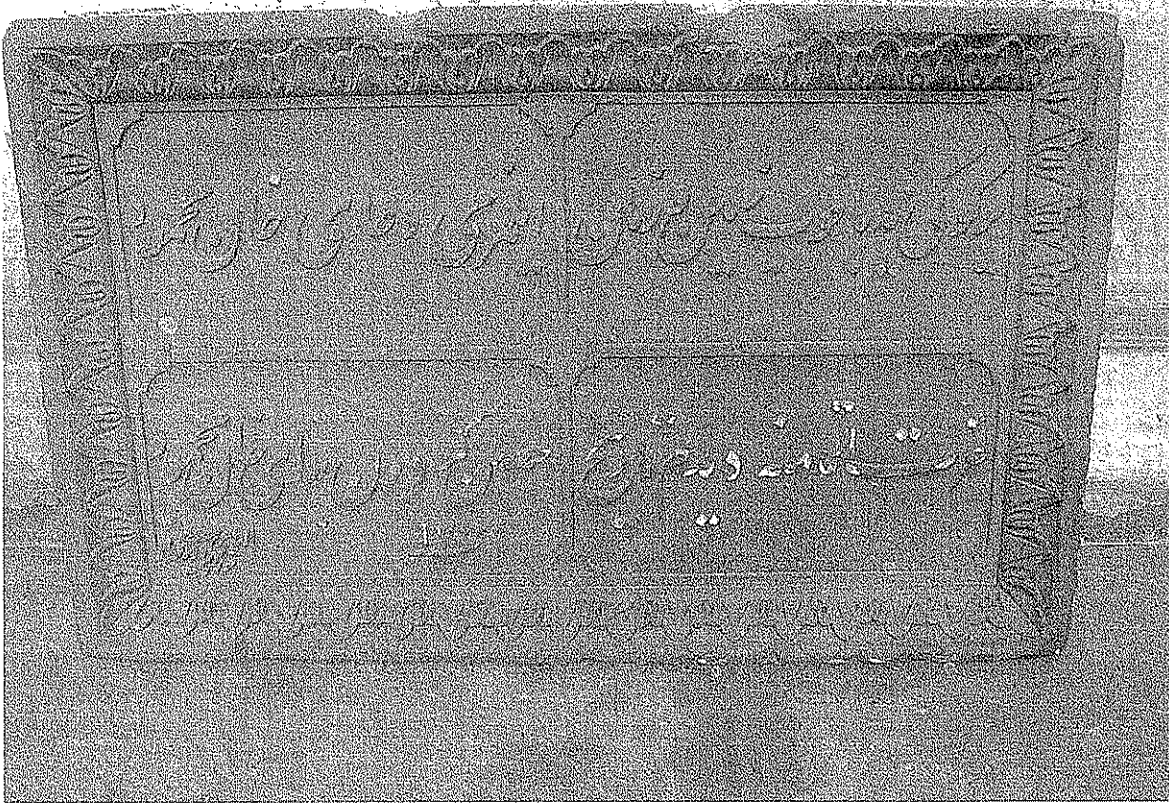
If one considers the period when these stone inscriptions were written, one can understand that one of the poets was Hasan Aynî² of Antep and the other was İzzet³, also known as Keçecizade. The aforementioned poets' works were carved on these stone artifacts by the artists (*nakkaş*) Mustafa Nuri Dede and Mehmet Rifat; the inscriptions were written at different times. The *ebced* method, a way of determining dates and having some literary aspects, was employed in the inscriptions as an important element of Turkish culture⁴.

¹ Stanisław Filip Rusiecki (1862-1944), attended the history department of the Jagellonian University but failed to take his degree. Rusiecki, who was a great collector, collected vases, cups, paintings, graphics, silver objects, ceramics and other artifacts from 1908 to 1939, and in February of 1939 he donated his entire collection to the National Museum. He inherited a portion of the collection from his father. In his biography, there is unfortunately no record of these three artifacts. He used the last name 'Ursyn-Rusiecki' after 1912. [the entry *Stanisław Filip Rusiecki* in: Rudowski, Rzańnicki 1991-1992: 133-135.]

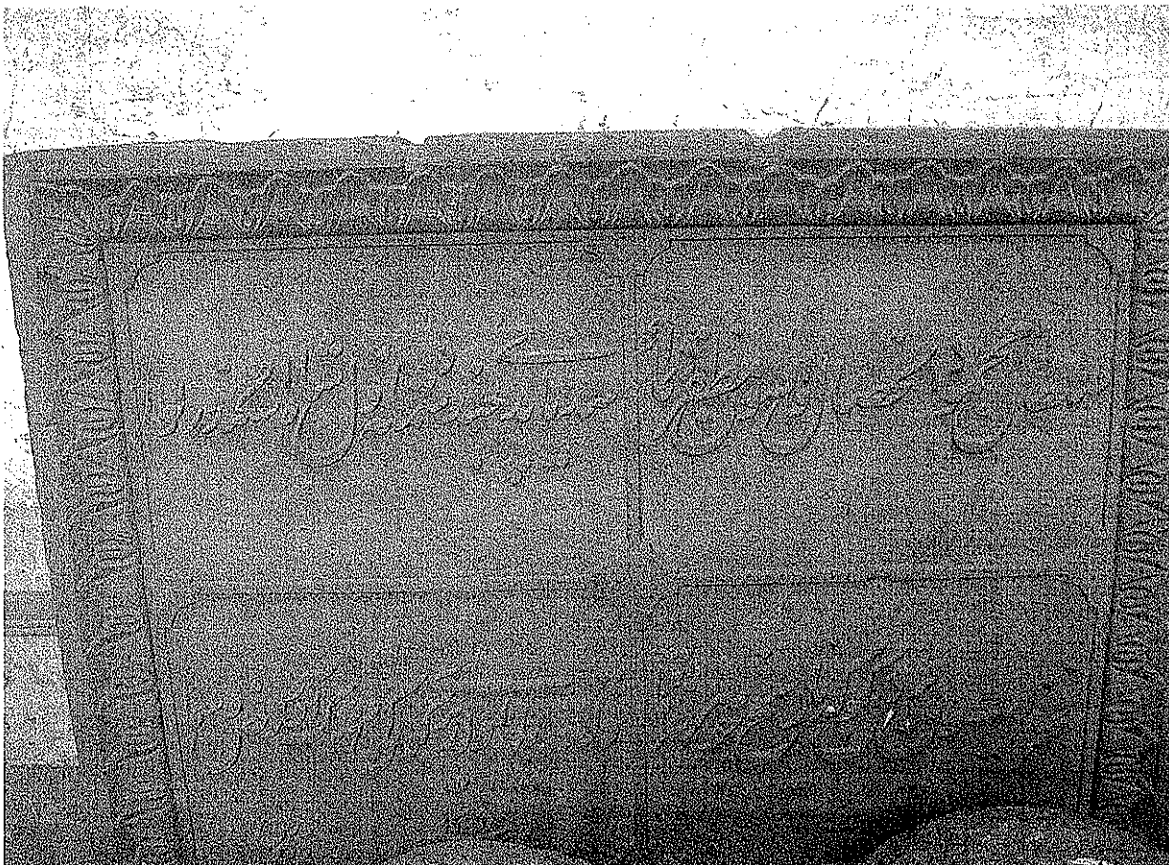
² Aynî was born in Antep in 1180/1766. The poems he presented to the palace and court statesmen played an important role in his life. He was rewarded with a medallion for a poem he presented to Mahmut II. He served as a judge (*kadı*) in the Rumelia towns. He died in 1837. His writings include *Turkish Divan*, *Nusret-nâme*, *Nazmu'l-Cevahir* and *Saki-nâme*. He was renowned in literature for his poetical history telling (*manzum tarihleri*). After Sürûri, he was one of the leading authors of poetical histories in Ottoman literature. He wrote a lyric poem (*gazel*) with İzzet Molla (Fatin 1271: 309; Arif Hikmet T. nr. 789, vr. 50a-b).

³ İzzet was born in İstanbul in 1785. His real name was Mehmet. He was known as Keçecizâde. He became the judge of Mecca in 1241/1825-26. He died in 1245/1829. His works included *Mihnet-i Keşan*, *Gülşen-i Aşk*, *Bahar-i Efkar* and *Hazan-i Asar*. He is the last representative of Divan literature prior to the Tanzimât period (Fatin 1271: 153; Mine Mengi 2002: 179).

⁴ The term '*ebced*,' is a system created by bringing the first 8 meaningless words and this system is employed for memorizing the letters of Arabic alphabet. One of the most important aspects of *ebced* is to use it in a mathematical calculation known as the "*ebced* calculation". Accordingly, each letter in *ebced* has a numerical value and these values are utilized in many different subjects. Each of these calculations is called *ebced*. In the *ebced* alphabet order, the letters are defined in numerical terms from 1 to 9, from 10 to 90 and from 100 to 1000. We can demonstrate this as follows:



Inscription No 1



Inscription No 2



Inscription No 3

The pieces which can be accepted as invaluable examples of artistic and historical artifacts of Ottoman culture, a culture which prevailed throughout a large area, can be viewed in the garden of the National Museum, which is located in Piłsudskiego Street in Cracow where they attract the attention of passers-by. These magnificent pieces are testaments to the Ottoman Empire – that once spread over three continents – and are examples of the importance of Turkish cultural elements in Cracow.

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