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ISLAMIC WORLD, THE RENAISSANCE AND ATATURK

Kemal ARI*

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Abstract

The main purpose of this article is to determine the main reasons that underlie the underdeveloped state that is prevalent in the Islamic geography despite the presence of vast wealth in the area. In order to pursue this purpose, the Islamic geography has been historically researched and roots of Islam have been probed into. Furthermore, conditions of the Islamic World have been analyzed by making a synchronized comparison between the Islam World and Europe; and references have been made to both the scientists and scientific developments of the Islamic World, and place of these developments have been researched within their time frame. Finally, significance and place of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk in the Islamic geography have been analyzed.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Islamic World, Islamic Renaissance, Islam, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, Renaissance

Atatürk, İslam Dünyası ve Rönesans

Öz

Bu makalenin esas amacı İslamiyet'in yayıldığı coğrafyada geniş zenginlikler bulunmasına rağmen bu coğrafyanın geri kalmasındaki temel nedenleri inceleyerek bunun üzerinden bir durum saptaması yapmaktır. Bunun için İslam coğrafyası tarihsel bakımdan incelenmiş ve İslam'ın köklerine inilmiştir. Bununla birlikte İslam dünyası ile Avrupa karşılaştırması yapılarak İslam dünyasının dönemsel olarak koşulları belirlenmiştir. Ayrıca İslam dünyasındaki bilim adamlarına ve bilimsel

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gelişmelere yer verilmiş ve bu bilimsel ilerlemeler dönemsel olarak incelenmiştir. Nihayetinde de Mustafa Kemal Atatürk'ün İslam coğrafyasındaki yeri ve önemi incelenmiştir.

Keywords: İslam Dünyası, İslam Rönesansı, İslam, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk

Prof Dr Aziz Sancar, a Turkish scientist who has been awarded the Nobel Prize in Chemistry, refers to the fact that Islamic World has not made a single contribution to the scientific world for 500 years. He also states that if this state of not making a single contribution was a matter of fate, then this fate ought to be changed¹.

It is apparent that the Islamic World has become the center of attention for the entire World owing to the geographical wealth it possesses and important opportunities it offers. However, this issue of being the center of attention is not a contemporary uniqueness. A historical analysis of the Islamic geography will make it evident that the area has always been the center of attention for many centuries. In addition to the underground riches that the area possesses, its geopolitical and geostrategic significances have led to its being in the foreground. Significance of the Islamic geography stems from the facts that it occupies the most centrally located lands on the World, and that there is power competition among the nations surrounding this area which are at the same time emerging as the new World Powers. Geographically, Islamic World is located at the intersection of this power competition. Apart from these, a big portion of the Islamic World is where a vast majority of the world's energy resources are located, and it is the chief transit point for the transportation of these resources. Above all, it is in the Islamic geography that the biggest 3 religions of the World have emerged. When locations of China in the east, Russia in the North, European nations in the West and the USA to the West of Europe are considered, the significance of Islamic geography becomes very apparent.

The significance of the Islamic geography cannot be attributable to the contemporary conditions. A glance at the past centuries and ancient times makes it possible to express that the Islamic geography has always occupied the most centrally located area on the World. It has been of utmost significance for

¹ Aydın Sayılı, "Batılılaşma Hareketimizde Bilimin Yeri ve Atatürk", *Hürriyet*, 26 May 2016., Erdem, I/1 (Ankara, 1985), p.11-25.

it has been on the crossroads of where hordes moved from North to South and east to West, and it has played a key role in the expansion of trade during those times; moreover, Islamic geography has always been the center of the attention for armies on their endeavors to conquer new lands.

However, there is a contrast when it is considered that a geographical location that has been of great significance is where the most undeveloped nations of the contemporary world are located. What has made this region with such a glorious and splendid past be as undeveloped as it is at present? Why have these lands been the stage where the most bloody wars have taken place? What makes it possible for the most ferocious terrorist groups to gain strength in this area, and why have armies competed on these lands? Why is it that a spirit of collective solidarity cannot be formed to combat the forcefulness and numerous atrocities of the forces of the invaders? Why do developments flare and then die out like the flash in the pan? What has been the reason that has prevented societies from completing their social evolutionary processes, and restricted them to remain in their tribal states? Why have national identities not developed? Furthermore, , regardless of how weak they might be, in regions such as Iraq, and Egypt, how and why have the attempts for a nationalist revival been suppressed and have been made to drown under the spirit of tribalism, and why has the modernization process constantly been obstructed? Why has the region not permitted the occurrence of scientific and logical advancements?

In the contemporary world, Islamic geography has to confront problems that are higher in intensity than the western World. These problems cannot be attributed to the conditions of the modern world as they have existed for centuries and they have been transferred to this day. Since present is the result of the past, the roots of these negative conditions are buried in the past. Unless a thorough analysis of the past is made, it is not possible to develop a comprehension of the current problems. Approaching the past interrogatively will function as the golden key to understanding the present. An analytical approach to the history of the Islamic lands will be crucial for a brighter future desired. The Middle East has been struggling against various kinds and forms of obstructions and without analyzing its own history to unearth where mistakes have been made , it cannot overthrow the burdensome obstructions.

A Panorama of the Islamic World in the first quarter of the 21st Century:

In terms of democratization processes, Islamic World is politically, socially and culturally far behind the Western World, beyond the Atlantic Ocean and its east. Its state of underdevelopment in these aspects is beyond comparison. Despite the fact that some nations seem to present a more developed image of themselves than they are because of the economic privileges that stem from their possession of oil, when these societies are examined in terms of the uneven income distribution, it becomes apparent that vast majority of these societies are struggling against poverty. Islamic societies that extend from the Chinese borders to Asian moorlands, from the Indian borders to North Africa and to the Mediterranean and from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic region are among the last nations in the line of development when they are analyzed in terms of economic and social scales. Since these societies identify themselves as Muslim countries, can their backwardness be attributable to the Islam religion or their being Muslims?

When viewed from a historical perspective, historical events and experiences make it impossible to hold the Islam religion accountable for the underdeveloped state of the Islamic World; and this is very well proven when the fact that the Islamic societies showed great advancements that were the outcome of rationalistic and scientific researches. Moreover, the principal motivation behind these developments were the emphasis on advancements in the Islam religion itself. The Islam Prophet has several times emphasized the importance of literacy; and he has ordered people to provide education for their daughters and sons, and he has even instructed his followers : *" Even if science is in China, go and get informed"* . Mohammad, who has stated that the ink dripping from the pens of intellectuals is more holly than the blood of martyrs, has always viewed intellectual believers a step ahead of the believers who were not learned. Furthermore, so long as a prisoner of war would teach 10 Muslims how to read and write, his freedom would be requested by Mohammed. Ali, who was one of the significant people in Islam and who was Mohammed's cousin and son in law, was a person whose statement *" I will be a slave to anyone who teaches me a letter"* illustrates how he has valued being an intellectual in high esteem. How, then, can societies existing in the geographical region where the dominant faith emphasizes literacy, intellectuality and spreading knowledge very strongly be as underdeveloped as they are? This state of being underdeveloped, and backwardness is in total contradiction with the main principals of the Islam religion. Besides, in the first 500 years that have been

referred to as the Golden Ages, there have been numerous intellectuals who have made significant contributions to advancements and to the promotion of rationalistic thinking².

While the Islamic World was in state of progression, Western World was in total state underdevelopment. However, Europe experienced the Renaissance Movement after the 15th Century; yet, within the same time frame, the Islamic World could not experience the same movement. Therefore, a state of being underdeveloped that has lasted for centuries has been experienced.

It was Atatürk who has been successful in reversing this backwardness by emphasizing rationalism and intellectualism. Numerous national and foreign intellectuals who have assessed his big revolution have labeled it as the “ Turkish Renaissance”. Owing to this Renaissance, Turkey has made remarkable progress. Therefore, it is very crucial for the Islamic World to understand Atatürk in depth and analyze the basis of his ideas to that underlie his revolutions.

George Sorton is one of the most prominent scientific historians of the 20th Century. In the past centuries, when a historical study of scientific developments was conducted, the most outstanding scientist of that 50-year period would be specified, and that scientist would become the symbol of that 50-year period. According to his studies, the most important scientists from 8th Century AD to 12th Century AD were as follows: Cābir, Hārezmī, Rāzi, Abū'l Vefa, Beyrūnī, İbn Sīnā, İbn Heysem, Ömer Hayyam... After 12Th Century AD, scientists such as Gerard, Roger Bacon start to make their appearance in the list. In light of this information, the conclusion to be reached is that most significant scientists to appear in the list were of Islamic geographical background; however, the needle of the compass changes after this date and scientists originating from the Western geography start to take their place in the list of scientists. Nevertheless, it cannot be said that scientific developments have stopped in the Islamic World, yet the rapid pace of developments have slowed down and only few Islamic scientists have been found to be worthy enough to be included in Sorton's list. These few names have been scientists such as , Nasreddin Tusi, İbn Nefis. In the years following 14th Century, studies in Semerkant and Istanbul meteorological stations were rarely included in the list ; in other words, their appearance was very much like the flickering star lights. However, quite soon, the Islamic

² A. Adnan Adıvar, *Tarih Boyunca İlim ve Din*, Remzi Publishing, İstanbul 1994, p. 74-75.

geography , which used to bright falls into darkness as the Islamic World starts to lose its pioneering role in scientific developments³.

Yet, years after the 8th Century have been characterized as years of awakening.

Translations from Greek and Syriac have been made. Moreover, observatories and research centers such as Beyt'ül Hikme ve Şemmasiye have been established⁴. A look at the next 500 years after this century reveals that Christian scientists assembling at centers such as Toledo and Salerno have already started translating important works of the Islamic World into western languages. High number of translations made in Spain and Sicily were laying the foundations of contemporary science.

Despite having experienced such a high ascent and having almost triggered the Renaissance movement in Europe, eastern World has entered a period of recession and then a decline, and the reason behind this recession and collapse which dates back to the 13th century has been a great concern for thinkers.

Science nourishes on rationalism which is grounded on questioning; and free thinking is the driving force behind scientific achievements. Science has its own governing principles and laws. There is no reason for science not to make advancements in a geographical region where scientific activities can be performed by scientists thinking freely within the boundaries of the governing principles and laws of science. The collapse of scientific developments in the Islamic World after this century are mainly attributable to the exclusion of rationalism and positive thinking from daily life. Instead of being determined by reason, behavioral patterns concerning to worldly life have been determined by religion, or rather by dogmatic propositions . These new ways of thinking led to a way of evaluating questions of rationalist thinking as interfering with the doings of God and with God himself ; and, therefore, any attempt to

³ Melek Dosay, "İslam Dünyasında Bir Bilim Dünyası Rönesansı ve Koşulları", *Ankara Üniversitesi Dil ve Tarih Coğrafya Fakültesi Dergisi*, Volume: XXXV, Number: 1 (Ankara, 1992), p. 75-80; Aydın Sayılı, "Ortaçağ İslâm Dünyasında İlmî Çalışma Temposundaki Ağırlaşmanın Bazı Temel Sebepleri", *Araştırma Dergisi*, Volume 1, (Ankara, 1963); Adnan Adıvar, *Bilim ve Din*, 1980 İstanbul, p. 89-98; Wilhelm Barthold, *İslâm Medeniyeti Tarihi*, (Translated by Fuad Köprülü), Ankara, 1977, p. 73-78.

⁴ Melek Dosay, "Matematik Rönesansına İslam Dünyasının Etkisi", *Araştırma Dergisi*, Volume: XIV, (Ankara, 1992), s. 147-158; Melek Dosay, "Ortaçağ İslam Cebirinin Latin Cebiri Üzerindeki Etkilerine Örnekler", *Bilim ve Felsefe Metinleri*, Volume: I Number: 2 (Ankara, 1992), p. 59-76; Melek Dosay, George Sarton ve Bilim Tarihi, *Erdem*, Volume: IX, Number: 25 (1996), p.117-153.

rationalist thinking has been seen as the source of blasphemy and committing a sin. If there are no questions in the life cycle, then there is obedience and there is servitude. After the 13th century, Islamic World has abandoned its perception of life based on interrogation, and moved towards a culture of servitude in its entirety. In other words, while Europe leaves the Medieval Ages behind and moves into the Renaissance, Islamic World turned its direction towards the Middle Ages of Europe, and a close look at near European history presents the irony in this matter:

Collapse of the Roman Empire and the repressive, authoritarian and forceful rules entirely based on the Christian Inquisition principles and Orthodox religious beliefs have driven Europe completely away from the age of reason. This new environment kept scientific thinking and ideology patterns dating back to the Greeks of the antiquity under pressure. Famous libraries have been burnt down or demolished. Outstanding intellectuals such as Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Euclid, Ptolemy, and Archimedes have started to be seen as the centers of blasphemy and sin. Therefore, Europe falls into dense darkness. This darkness lasts till the beginning of the Renaissance in the 14th Century. Bloody revolutions, wars, mass executions and tyranny were the characteristics ruling over Europe in the Medieval Ages. Priests and the cardinals referred to as the symbols of religion have publicly been announcing anyone and any group not a member of their group as heathens who have fallen into blasphemy. Church exceeds the confines of worship and faith; and it interferes with the way people eat, drink, work, have family and with the personal rights of people. Strict adherence to rules has been obligatory. The disobedient have been announced as having deserted their faith and accused of blasphemy; therefore, violence and massacres have become a common occurrence. There has been a search for demons in almost everything. Rules set by the church have been enforced on people and on the society as if they were divine law. There has been no need for reason in an environment governed by such strict laws; as there were the few in the Church making decisions on behalf of the others, and people were expected to be only obedient. Thus, the end was restrictions on freedoms. Rationalism was excluded from the limits of everyday life. Producing any knowledge was judged as becoming demonized. This strict order has caused the emergence of the law system referred to as “the inquisition”.

There have been very unbelievable examples of the Inquisition. One of these instances was in Wycliffe’s case. Wycliffe studied the age of the World basing it on the fossils and asserted that the age of the World was far more than

a few hundred thousand years. After him, Archbishop Usher announced that he had come to the conclusion by studying the Bible that the formation of the universe was AD October 23, 4004, 9 o'clock. Naturally, his calculations and results did not match with Wycliffe's findings. By the time Archbishop reached a conclusion about the origins of the universe, Wycliffe had long been deceased. As a consequence, this person was labeled as sinful; therefore, his bones were taken out from his tomb and thrown into the sea, which meant getting rid of the microbes of a heathen from the World. Church was also asserting that earth was the center of the system of which it was a member, and it strengthened its assertion by suggesting that the earth was flat. Therefore, many scientists who argued that earth was not but the sun was the center of the system to which it belonged were accused of blasphemy. Such was the case for physicians like Ptolemy and Galileo, who were among those accused during the Middle Ages⁵. When it was said that the earth was a round sphere, those believing in the Christian principles would say that "it would be irrational to say that trees would grow upwards in other parts of the World, or an apple taken off from its branch would go upwards". Yet, traces of this information date back to the Antiquity⁶. The Church assumed that all its assertions were right. The reason of all illnesses was Satan. Starvation, infertility, unpleasant weather conditions and epidemics were all the evil doings of evil spirits. Evil spirits would hide and dwell among the clouds in the atmosphere and approach blood and incenses offered by the heathens who would view themselves as God⁷. Thinning of the body was caused by the sins. It was possible to be cleared from sins only through the Church. Epidemics were stemming from God. Tempests were caused by Satan. When Satan would come, bells should be tolled to dismiss him. Hurricane, frost, hail and flood were natural disasters caused by the witches. Therefore, women engaged in witchcraft should be tortured and killed⁸.

These facts are clear indicators that the Medieval Europe was declining. However, there was a great awakening in science and rationalism in the Islamic

⁵ Alexandre Koyré, *Bilim Tarihi Yazıları I* (Translated by Kurtuluş Dinçer), Tbitak Publishing, Ankara, 2006.

⁶ Hasan Aslan, "Doęa Kavramının Tarihsel Gelişimi", *Felsefe Dnyası*, Volume: 2, Number:46 (2007).

⁷ Carl Sagan, *Karanlık Bir Dnyada Bilimin Mum Işıęı*, (Translated by Miyase Gktepelı), Tbitak Publishing, Ankara, 2014.

⁸ Benzer örnekler deęişik kaynaklarda bolca bulunabilir. Örneęin bkz. Burcu Tekin, "Ortaçaę İspanyasına Büy, Byclk ve "La Celestina" Adlı Esere Yansıması", *Ankara niversitesi Dil ve Tarih-Coęrafya Fakltesi Dergisi*, Volume: 1 Number: 55 p. 20, 159; 305-324; Martin Louis. *Cadıılıęın Tarihi: Ortaçaę'da Bilge Kadının Katili*, (Translated by Barış Baysal), Kalkedon, İstanbul, 2009. Brian P. Levack, *Hexenjagd, Die Geschichte der Hexenverfolgungen in Europa*, Mnchen, 1999.

World. This was mainly due to the fact that during the expansion period of Islam, wherever the Ottoman army went, they came across scientific and intellectual works dating back from the Antiquity in the libraries and cultural foundations in those places. These works were rapidly translated into Arabic. Thus, scientific and rationalistic thinking of the Antiquity was transferred to the Islamic World. The awakening of the Greek World with its emphasis on reason was blocked by Medieval Europe, but the Islamic World became highly involved with it. Meanwhile, significant works of Egypt and Mesopotamia were come across. Islamic World was being nourished by three important resources: Greek, Mesopotamian and Egyptian civilizations.....Scientific researches in Mathematics, medicine and , Astronomy that had the chance to thrive in this geographical location found the chance to be poured into the Islamic World like water gauging from a canal in abundance, and they were making their appearances in different intellectual centers and were engaging in new intellectual debates. Great importance was given to science during the Abbasside period in the Islamic World. In the 9th Century, one of the Abbaside caliphs, Memun, and some other political and religious leaders gave special support to science and scientists. Resources that could be reached were collected at Beytul Hikme , a cultural center founded in Baghdat. An institution that resembled the Library of Alexandria , known as the source that provided scientific nourishment for the Mediterranean World, was coming into being. Many madrasahs were becoming pioneers with their support for scientists and philosophers. Significant scientists and philosophers came from the large geography extending from the Arab Peninsula, Iraq, North Africa and Spain. Within the sectarian movements, there was the emergence of supporters who asserted that knowledge gained through revelation could only be meaningful so long as it was assessed and judged in the limits of reason. To exemplify, although Kaderis emerged as a movement that politically opposed the Umayyads, they were totally against the support of fortuitism. Despite the fact that the Umayyad were never supportive of this movemet, in the later years Fortuitism formed the basis of Mu'tazila. Mu'tazila was the Islamic rationalist philosophical school known to propose to combine faith with rationality. For this school which emerged during the Umayyad period, revelation was equally important as reason was⁹.

⁹ İbrahim Agah Çubukçu, "Mutezile ve Akıl Meselesi", *Ankara Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* , Volume: 12, 1964.

Of course, as a response to the Mu'tazila's ideas, there emerged opponents who commented very strictly. Although this movement was influential for nearly a hundred years, in the following years , it was totally eradicated especially from higher offices. Government offices became under the control of religiously conservative people, and these people eventually regarded any religious perception based on reason as blasphemy. As this view gained strength over time, especially philosophy was started to be evaluated as opposing God and as irreligious. This conservatism and irrationalism coincided with the period when awakening of reason was at its peak , and the Christian World was very critical of this awakening of rationalism and it was trying very hard to reach an understanding of the reasons that caused this acquaintance with rationalism. What was going on was like the seesaw; the Scholastic Christian World which was led into reason and science through the Islamic World was advancing towards rationalism and science; conversely, the Islamic World was excluding rationalism and intellect from social life. Nevertheless, this was not an occurrence that took place everywhere at the same time. In other words, the intellectual environment that paved the way to this awakening gradually lost its initial importance, and it was replaced by a concept of life which was based on rigid beliefs, dogmas and superstitions. Having become the owner of rationalistic and scientific methods which had been the symbols of the Islamic World, Western World first brought up the Renaissance. The Renaissance highlighted the individual and rationalist thinking. The climate that the Renaissance created became the founding principle of the Age of Enlightenment, the roots of which date back to the 17th Century. During this period, rationalist thinking and scientific research methods developed alongside one another. Concrete results obtained through exact science became significant. After the invention of steam engine by James Watt in 1776, first half of the 19th Century witnessed The Industrial Revolution.

While the Western World was experiencing such changes , what was the Islamic World experiencing?

Because the Islamic World turned its direction towards transferred knowledge based on revelation, it could not experience neither the Renaissance nor its conditions. Since the Renaissance could not be experienced, its consequence the Age of Enlightenment developed exclusive of the Islamic World. The Age of Enlightenment paved the way to the Industrial Revolution; however, the Islamic World was still trying to interpret the World with perceptions that were the remnants of the 13th Century. Therefore, its efforts to

bring meaning into life were futile as there were gigantic gaps between the West and itself.

What is the importance of Atatürk?

Unfortunately, having been an important part of the Islamic World, the Ottoman Empire could not protect itself from this falling behind and backwardness. Not having had the chance to experience the Renaissance, it could not experience the revolutionary rationalist thinking. Therefore, it was distanced from the Age of Enlightenment. Although there have been some scientific attempts at the individual level, they could not pass beyond being flash in the pan. Unfortunately, these attempts were far beyond providing the bright expansive light of the Age of Enlightenment to the entire society. Movements, ideas and views that would give way to rationalism did not have a long lasting effect at neither social nor governing levels. When technological superiority resulting from the Age of Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution were viewed, Military superiority could not even be mentioned. Relationships that existed between both the East and the West, and the Cross and the Crescent started the Collapse Period of the Ottoman Empire in the 19th Century. The period of regression that started with the Defeat of Vienna and loss of territory, and the attacks of the imperialist capitalist racist forces brought the threat of loosing Anatolia which was the only Turkish land that was left.

As a response to this state of affairs, Turkish Nation protected its nation against and won its nation back from the imperialist attacks. With the recession of the Greek forces in Izmir on 9 September 1922, a new period was to start on the new Turkish land that included East Thrace region and Anatolia. In this new period, in order to find solutions to the age old problems and in order to prevent the likelihood of the reappearance of the same outcomes, there needed to be extra ordinary efforts. Mustafa Kemal Atatürk became the Pioneer and leader of the Turkish Revolution on his own freewill, desire and objective.

The objective of this revolution was to help the nation which had been saved from the attacks of imperialism and go into the Age of Enlightenment, and to be able to divert the superiority that the West had earned in favor of Turkey and the Turks. Superiority among nations was going to be established through rationalism and science in the new period. Therefore, Ideal of Modernization had become the wide ideology for Atatürk¹⁰. He believed that

¹⁰ Aydın Sayılı, *ibid*, p. 11-25.

the prerequisite of this was to create a state with a secular structure. He held the belief that it was not possible for a society which had not been secularized, living Daily life according to religious rules, and focusing on life after death rather than on the life that is lived by individuals at present to reach the level of contemporary societies. Therefore, he made radical changes in education, culture and in every area of daily life all of which were structured according to religious rules and principles. By founding nation state, he paved the way to exercising national sovereignty by the nationalized society without any interference¹¹.

Unfortunately, Islamic World has not been able to succeed in transcending the newly constructed concept of life of the 13th century in its entirety. Exclusion of reason and common sense is still prevalent, and daily life is being shaped by superstitions that are being imposed as though they were religious laws which, in reality, are far from being related to religion, and instead of living life that is more concerned about nature and this World, individuals are under the repressive regimes of dictatorships and they are engulfed by the fictitious cycle that the superstitions impose as though they were religion based. The level of advancements of these overcrowded societies not having been able to be enlightened does not allow these societies to transcend their current levels and reach a level of advancement and maturity which will enable them to compete with western countries. The only person who has succeeded in doing this in the Middle east and on a larger scale in the Islamic World has been Atatürk, and the most significant example of this has been the formation of the Turkish Republic with its principles and its essence under his leadership. Islamic World needs a Renaissance, and in order to accomplish this, rediscovery of Atatürk is an inevitable necessity.

¹¹ Kemal Arı, *Atatürk ve Aydınlanma*, Yakın Kitabevi, İzmir, 2009; Macit Gökberk, "Aydınlanma Felsefesi Devrimler ve Atatürk", *Çağdaş Düşüncenin Işığında Atatürk*, F. Eczacıbaşı Vakfı Publishing, İstanbul, 1986, p. 303-304.

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