

From *Qutadġu Bilig* till *Wu-t'i Ch'ing-wên-chien*

— Development of the Arabic orthography used in the Central Asian Turkic —

With the adoption of Islam, the Arabic script began to be used to write the Turkic languages of Central Asia. Although we have no exact knowledge on the earliest orthography actually used, a comparison between the earlier manuscripts (XIII–XIV centuries) and the later ones (XV–XVI centuries) suggests the existence of two different types of orthography: the “early orthography” and the “classical orthography”. The former is characterized by the partial correspondence of plene (full)/non-plene (defective) writing of the first syllable vowels with their etymological vowel lengths, nonuse of the word final *hā'* as a vowel letter, use of the triply-dotted *fā'*, etc. The latter, on the other hand, is characterized by the plene writing of nearly all vowels, extensive use of the word final *hā'* as a vowel letter, the absence of the triply-dotted *fā'*, etc.

From the above observation, it is safe to assume that the fifteenth century literary language—generally known as “Classical Chagatay”—represents a new stage in the history of the development of the Turkic literary languages, rather than a simple continuation of the previous stages.

The early orthography, however, was not entirely replaced by the classical orthography everywhere since some manuscripts of the eighteenth century, such as *Šajara-i tarākima* or *Wu-t'i Ch'ing-wên-chien*, contain some traces of the early orthography.