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## JAN AMOS KOMENSKY AND HIS TRANSLATION ACTIVITIES RELATED TO OTTOMAN TURKISH

**Abstract.** This article is dedicated to the historical realtions of well-known czech philosopher and father of modern pedagogy to Ottoman turkish language. Here we can see the reasons and the stages of translation Bible into turkish by the leading protestant of Europe, which was the high contribution for the devolopment of turcology and Ottoman turkish language knowledges in Czech lands and in all European continent.

**Keywords:** J. A. Komensky, Kuman Turks, Ottoman Turkish, Czech brothers, calvinoturkism, missionary.

European countries have been interested in the East since the Middle Ages. As a scientific continuation of this interest, later in many European countries, including Czechoslovakia, the science of Oriental studies and Arabic studies, Iranian studies, sinology, indology and Turkology, which are important branches of this science, emerged and developed. In our opinion, the interest of Europeans in the East arose mainly during the Crusades and later during the “Ottoman threat”. At the root of this interest, of course, was a tendency for Europeans to defend themselves as a result of successive threats from the East, then to occupy Eastern lands, and as the world order changed, so did political, economic, and trade cooperation. These tendencies are also reflected in the Czech lands. The father of world pedagogy, the great Czech thinker Jan Amos Comenius (J. A. Komensky), although never in the East, repeatedly spoke about the Islamic world in his writings. There are a number of historical documents about J. A. Komensky’s relations with the East, including the Ottoman Turks. Such documents can be found in the researches of communists and other scientists working in Czechoslovakia. According to the scientific commentator Vlasta Tatiana Mishkovska’s scientific article “From Comenius to the Sultan” published in the 60s of the last century, the tendency to the East

in the multifaceted work of J. A. Komensky is a manifestation of the Czech interest in the Middle East in general [1, 29]. J. A. Komensky’s greatest contribution to Turkic studies was the translation of the Bible into Turkish. His decision to translate the Bible into Turkish is linked to his religious mission. Thus, J. A. Komensky lived a missionary activity on the one hand, and preached it on the other. The various factors that influenced his life, his skill, and his wisdom led him to conclude that missionary activity should be the main occupation of the true church. According to him, in order to build a strong missionary faith, hope and unshakable faith must be united under the rule of Jesus Christ. Jacomenski preached that a return to Christianity was the most inevitable task of the church, and that “those who received the revelations of God” were obliged to do so [2, 205]. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Protestants began to publish grammar books and dictionaries on the languages of the Muslim peoples, as well as to translate the Bible into these languages. *Janua linguarum (The Door to Languages)*, published in 1631 by J. A. Komensky in Latin. The translation of his work into Arabic, Persian, and Ottoman Turkish [3, 242] was one of the important steps in the realization of his missionary ideas in the East. For this reason, we believe that J. A. Komensky’s decision to translate the Bible into

Turkish and to get closer to the Turks was not the result of illogicality. J. A. Komensky was one of the leaders of the “Czech Brotherhood” of the Protestant denomination of Christianity, which at that time did not agree with the religious and political ideology of the government in the Catholic Habsburg Empire. Moravia in the Czech Republic of this denomination Habsburg troops attack Fulnek, the ideological center of the city. While living in exile in the Netherlands, the center of Protestantism in Europe, J. A. Komensky, one of the sect’s ideologues, had a grudge against the Catholic Habsburg regime. After the Battle of the White Mountain in 1620, not only the Dutch but also all European Protestants set out to unite with the Ottoman Empire against the Habsburg Empire in order to carry out their religious and political plans. Evidence of this can be seen in the negotiations of Jindřich Matias Turnu, who led the silk war against the Habsburgs, in 1622 in Istanbul, during a campaign against Vienna, for support from the Ottomans [5, 250]. Although not given substantial support, these talks helped to reduce violence against Protestants in Europe and to establish and spread tolerance against Turks. Although this trend continued, at a time when anti-Turkish ideology was widespread on the continent, J. A. Komensky was ready and eager to organize the translation of the Bible into Turkish and to write a letter of dedication to Sultan Mehmet IV [5, 250]. J. A. Komensky also had great respect for Islam. According to him, “Islam is like a tree whose roots rise to the air and whose branches bend to the ground and branch out”. For this reason, J. A. Komensky intended to present the then Ottoman sultan, Mehmet IV, with a letter of dedication addressed to the sultan, a translation of the Bible, the holy book of Christians, into Turkish and the Holy Quran into Latin. In his letter to the Sultan, J. A. Komensky noted that Judaism, Christianity and Islam had the same foundations, and that it was important for these three monotheistic religions to coexist in a spirit of tolerance and spirituality. The aim was to eliminate the Habsburgs through the Ottomans, who were challenging Europe at the time, to create tolerance for the Turks by inviting

them to Christianity, and to achieve the unity of Christianity. For this reason, even in Europe, “*Calvinoturkismus*” (Kalvinoturkism) reports that Protestants are inclined to Turks, ideology was formed [3, 242; 6, 41–42; 7, 109; 8, 63]. Of course, the emergence of this ideology is the result of the successful policy pursued by the Ottomans in Europe. So that, From the beginning of the 16th century, it was one of the Ottomans’ priorities in Europe to protect Calvinists and Lutherans, who were Protestants. In order to use them against the Habsburgs, the Ottoman emperor Sultan Suleiman declared that he considered Protestants who “destroyed idols and rebelled against the pope” to be close to Muslims [9, 20]. Examining J. A. Komensky’s letter of dedication to Sultan Mehmet IV, it can be concluded that he had a high opinion of the sultan. Even in his letter to the sultan, the Czech thinker elevated him to the level of the prophet Suleiman by using the following words: The letter also expresses his sympathy for Ottoman Turkish: “... We present to you the Book of the Law, which has reached us from God and has *been translated into your language and written in beautiful letters*, so that your people may live with contentment, as in the words of Baruch”. It quotes the prophet as saying, “We, the children of Israel, are pleased that the truths concerning those whom God loves are sent down to us in the form of revelation”. This mission was carried out by J. A. Komensky with the financial support of his close friend, the son of the artist Louis de La Gere, a well-known artist of the Baroque period in France at that time, the Dutch merchant Laurent de La Gere. In 1658, Laurent de La Gir regularly negotiated with Levin Varner, a well-known orientalist in Istanbul and the Dutch ambassador to Istanbul, to undertake the translation of the Bible into Ottoman Turkish. All this work was supervised by Jacob Golias, a professor of Oriental languages at the University of Leiden in the Netherlands, of German descent [3, 242; 5, 250]. Comenius wrote in a letter to Samuel Hartlib, an English ally, educator and social reformer: “Today we have once again written to Constantinople, to Warner, not only to inform us of the condition of the Greek Church,

but also to undertake the translation of the Bible into Turkish. The pious and noble Mr. de Gere undertakes to give a large sum of money and to cover all expenses ... ” [5, 250; 10]. Although Warner assumed this responsibility, his knowledge of the Turkish language was not sufficient to carry out such a large-scale work as the translation of the Bible. For this reason, he aroused the interest of the first translator of Sultan Mehmet IV, known as Ali Bey, Albert (Wojciech) Bobowski, originally from Poland, and involved him in the translation of the Bible into Turkish. According to some sources, Ali Bey lived in Istanbul since childhood and mastered the Turkish language. He was also fluent in the languages of leading European countries. Despite all the work done, the Bible was not translated into Turkish and presented to Sultan Mehmet IV at that time. According to some sources, the translation was not censored by Jacob Goliath's brother in Lebanon, the monk Peter Golias, due to Levin Varner's poor knowledge of the Turkish language [5, 250]. The work begun by the Czech thinker J.A. Komensky is being completed, albeit belatedly, by the Bible Society in Paris. Ali Bey's translation was published in full in 1827. Exhibit No. 32 in Leiden in 1970 presents manuscript versions of the translation of the Bible into

Turkish as exhibit 32, which states that Levin Warner not only translated, but also helped Ali Bey in 1662–1664. J. A. Komensky's interest in the translation of the Bible, his loyalty to Sultan Mehmet, and his tendency towards Turkic studies in general raise many questions about his nationality and place of birth. J. A. Komensky's family was originally from the village of Komna in the Czech town of Boykovice, Uherskobrodsko Oblast. Paying attention to the fact that his surname is “Komensky” and the name of his native village of Komna, one gets the impression that J. A. Komensky had relations with the Kuman Turks, who first settled in these areas and later assimilated into the Slavs. J. A. Komensky used several pseudonyms in his writings. Nivnicenus (*Nivnitseli*), formerly the village of Nivnitse, used the nickname *Hunnobrodensis* (from a Hungarian spring) when operating in the Sarospatak region of Hungary, and later remained under the pseudonym *Comenius* (*Komnali*). The nicknames *Hunnobrodensis* and *Comenius* indicate his connection with the ancient Turks, namely the Hun and Kuman Turks. To find out this connection, it is necessary to look at the etymology of these nicknames, the historical stages of the settlement of the ancient Turks in these areas.

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