

Werk

Titel: Counting-out rhymes of Turkey

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Counting-out rhymes of Turkey

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La comptine est un genre mineur peu étudié mais riche d'enseignements. Ces petites formules que les enfants récitent avant une séance de jeu constituent un véritable laboratoire de langue et une source irremplaçable de connaissance des mécanismes d'acquisition de la culture. Pour la première fois, les comptines de Turquie sont étudiées et classées.

The counting-out rhyme is a minor genre in folklore classification. These little formulas beginning a game session are an actual language laboratory. They are very useful for the understanding of the mechanisms of culture acquisiton. For the first time Turkey's counting-out rhymes are studied and classified.

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Counting-out rhymes—which could be defined as set phrases used by children before they start a game—have generally been overlooked as a folklore genre. The child was considered a non-person by the adults, and its verbal output was therefore considered non-discourse, devoid of any interest. Adults found young children's linguistic and poetic activity disturbing, as they could neither follow them to the utmost limits of language, nor share their indifference to denotation. In Europe it was not until the end of the 19th century that general compulsory schooling was established, that the first works on the subject were published, but they were still rare. As a matter of fact, teachers were the first to understand how useful these ditties were to young children in their exploration of the world. Scholars, and particularly the founders of ethnology were not interested in them, as the words of Rossat (1910: 244) clearly show:

"I didn't even try to give a more or less accurate French translation of these ditties; I think any such attempt would be perfectly useless ..., it would be childish to rack one's brain to give meaning to these sounds which don't have any whatsoever."

The bibliography on the subject is limited to a Swiss anthology compiled by Blavignac in 1879, an American study at the end of the 19th century (Bolton 1888), a German work written by Bodmer in 1923, a French doctoral thesis published by Arleo in 1982 and an American dictionary of counting-out rhymes published by Abrahams & Rankin in 1980. As far as I know, nothing has been published so far about Turkey, and this justifies my interest.

I will begin with a brief presentation of the corpus I have chosen before trying to show its interest from a linguistic point of view and, finally, discussing what information it provides in other fields.

1. The corpus

The earliest mention I know of a counting-out rhyme in Turkey dates from approximately one century ago. Reverend J. L. Barton noted it down in the area of Harput and communicated it to H. Bolton, who gave it a rather fanciful transcription (Bolton 1888):

American rendering: Turkish reconstitution (?):

Ilp ilp ilmedén, Ip ip ilmeden

Selug silug silmedén;
Yel khos kepené;
Kepen ichini bazàr;
Ichinde ayoo gezér,
Ayoo beni khookhoòdě
Khoolakhěmě sar'ghědě;

Sülük sülük silmeden
Yer koz kepene(k)
Kepen(ek) içi bit pazar
Içinde ayu gezer
Ayu beni korkuttu
Kulağını sarkıttı

Alàghĕnà, Alağına
Chalàghĕnà, Şalağına
Akh dedì, Al dedi
Chekh dedì Çık dedi

With this exception, the first person who has, though indirectly, studied these rhymes is my mentor and friend Pertev Naili Boratav. From the late 1930s to the early 50s, he gathered, throughout the towns and

villages of Anatolia, a comprehensive collection of game and gamerelated rhymes. One must keep in mind that the function of the counting-out rhyme is to determine the "it" (in Turkish *ebeleşmek*). I have drawn from these archives all elements related to counting-out rhymes. To these I added the material gathered by A. Caferoğlu around the same time in other towns and villages of Anatolia, material that constitutes a felicitous complement to Boratav's documents.

Pertev Naili Boratav's archives are presently at the Laboratoire d'Ethnologie et de Sociologie Comparative UPX-Labethno/PNB VIII/3, IX/1, IX/3 of Paris-X University. Here is a detailed list:

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Dosye I
Zarf 1. Ankara (1945). Kaynak: I-XIX (186 formül, 487 oyun)
Zarf 2. Ankara (1947-48). Kaynak: XX-XXVII (8 formül, 104 oyun)
Dosye II
Zarf 1. (1945) Kaynak: XXVII-XXXIII (47 formül, 104 oyun)
Zarf 2. (1947-48) Kaynak: XXXIV-XLVI (25 formül, 236 oyun)
Zarf 3. Ankara (1945-46). Kaynak: 1-7 (22 oyun)
Dosye III
Zarf 1. Ankara (1947-48). Kaynak: XLVII-LX (24 formül, 235 oyun)
Dosye IV
Konya (1953). Oğuz Tansel (646 formül)
Dosye V
Konya (1954). Oğuz Tansel (Pertev tarafından düzenlenmemiş; I-LVI'a kadar
düzenledim)
Dosye VI
Yozgat (1947-48). İ. Gökbahar (40 formül, 345 oyun)
Dosye VII
Gölköy (1948-49). Yetkin (320 oyun)
Dosye VIII
Zarf 1. Tokat (1950). Ercan (25 formül)
Zarf 2. Sandıklı (1950). İ. Başgöz (12 formül)
      İzmir (1950). H. Eğilmez (19 formül)
      Mersin (1954). Cahit Öztelli (30 formül)
      Kayseri (1950). Göğceli (2 formül)
Zarf 3. Tokat (1950). İ. Başgöz (düzenlenmemiş)
Zarf 4. Ankara, Kastamonu (1941, 1950-52). P. N. Boratav
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A. Caferoğlu tarafından derlenen malzemeler:

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C I = Anadolu dialektolojisi üzerine malzeme, Ankara 1941
C II = Doğu illerimiz ağızlarından toplamalar, İstanbul 1942
C III = Anadolu ağızlarından toplamalar, İstanbul 1943
C IV = Güney-doğu illerimiz ağızlarından toplamalar, İstanbul 1945
C V = Kuzey-doğu illerimiz ağızlarından toplamalar, İstanbul 1946
C VI = Orta-Anadolu ağızlarından derlemeler, İstanbul 1948.
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The whole body of documents I have checked contains 1208 countingout rhymes, which delineate 237 basic types (see different examples at the end of this article). Each type represents an unlimited number of forms. Variation is indeed the main feature of the counting-out rhyme.

Some of them present an interesting characteristic: they are partly or totally constituted of "wild words". These words are coined by children themselves and are a means for the individual to elaborate his own language. This can be considered a memory of the capacity we all have, when we are born, to speak all languages; counting-out rhymes bear a trace of this gift of tongues. Hence frequent borrowings from foreign languages, which in fact, can no longer bear that name as they are automatically integrated.

2. A few linguistic characteristics of counting-out rhymes

I shall first focus on wild words (400 in my corpus) and their phonological structure.

Table 1. Initial vowel order by decreasing frequency

```
Initial vowel order in the wild words (decreasing frequency):

e a i o ı ü u ö

Initial vowel order in standard Turkish (Bazin 1994: 77):

a e i o u ü ö ı

Initial vowel order in Pre-Ottoman Turkish (Khourchid 1990: 60):

a e i u o ö ü ı
```

We notice that the order of the initial vowels differs from that of standard Turkish. Children prefer open front vowels to their back counterparts. We also notice the unusual frequency of the closed nonlabial vowel /1/.

The same remark could be applied to initial consonants:

Table 2. Initial consonant order by decreasing frequency

```
Initial consonant order in the wild words:

m d t b p k h s l z f ç r ş g v c n y j
Initial consonant order in standard Turkish (Alpman: 1969):

k d y b t g s c ç h m f v p r l ş z n j
Initial consonant order in Pre-Ottoman Turkish (Khourchid1990: 60):

k b s d y m t h g n ş f c ç z p v r l (j)
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The unusual frequency of the letters /m, h, r, l/ in wild words points to the very ontology of language, as these contoids are precisely those we find in the babble which precedes the appearance of language. The labial vowel /o/, tightly connected to affectivity, plays a considerable role in noninitial position. We can thus pick out the following words:

Table 3. /o/ in noninitial position

[C+/o/] monosyllables: bo, co, do, dö, go, ho, jo, po
[C+/o/+Cnasal] monosyllables: bom, con, mom, pon, töm, von, zon
[/o/ ending] disyllables: ago, diro, katzo, mendo, rofo, vizo
ambaro, bekribo, fedamo, fiyango, istirbo
karako, lipanto, nebido, sebedo, sibedo
[/o/ ending] quadrisyllables: dosinado, orinado, gandalifo, simanesto
[/o/ ending] pentasyllables: aleredino

¹ I also used Alpman (1969), which contains 459 entries and constitutes a reference corpus coherent with my 400 wild words.

Children don't hesitate to juxtapose consonants in clusters which are not all within the norm of standard Turkish, which prefers a liquid (r, l) followed by an occlusive (p, t, k) (cf. Ergin 1990).

Table 4. Consonant clusters

| t+n | natnar | f+t | buftin, buftiri | ş+n | kuşna, |
|-----|--------|-----|-----------------|-----|--------|
| f+r | pufra | r+f | morfa | | |
| t+l | batlak | d+r | dra, dras | | |
| m+r | somru | r+n | naldırnaç | | |

Vowel disharmony is frequent because it allows the speaker to create unexpected sounds, and we can notice a tendency to play on the contrast between harmonic features:

Table 5. Vowel disharmony

| L DOGT DOGT | , , | 1 - 2 - 1 - 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 |
|------------------|-----------|--|
| [+POST, -POST] | / a - e/: | alerestina, badelek, laleke, panse, zatelyon |
| [-POST, +POST] | /e - a/: | belnannacı, berani, çemdan ena, enna, |
| | | fedamo, perani |
| [+APERT, -APERT] | /i - a/: | tizma, bedira, kiyaru, mikramarum |
| [-APERT, +APERT] | /a - i/: | akribi, amil, babili, dandik, gandalifo |
| | | gandi, lali, makedi, pali, sadraki |
| [+LAB, -LAB] | /o - i/: | domil, dosi, orinado |
| | /o - e/: | moden |
| | /u - i/: | kukulik |
| | /u- e/: | buşye |
| | /ü - a/: | kütüpa |
| [-LAB, +LAB] | /i - o/: | gandalifo, istirbo, keterizon |
| | /e - o/: | mendo, sebedo, simanesto |
| | /a - o/: | aylom, bayloz, farfoylom |

If we now turn to the morphology of normal words in the counting-out rhyme, we notice that it adheres to a basic communication pattern. A sample of 64 counting-out rhymes shows us that nominal predicates are twice as numerous as verbal ones.

Table 6. Number predicational morphemes

| Type of predicational morpheme: | Number: | |
|---------------------------------|---------|--|
| nominal | 42 | |
| imperative | 21 | |
| constative /DI/ | 16 | |
| indefinite present /Er/ | 4 | |
| nonconstative /mİş/ | 2 | |
| progressive present /İyor/ | 1 | |
| suppositive /sE/ | 1 | |

Thus, we have only few verbs, either in the imperative or the constative form, which are the most essential forms for children, being the first they learn, as Ayhan Aksu-Koç (1988: 198-199) has shown. There is hardly any occurrence of the present progressive or the future.

The conditions of use of the substantive are equally telling. The predominance of the absolute case is overwhelming. Among spatial cases, only the directive, which has a positive connotation for the speaker, occurs from time to time; its opposite, the ablative, which marks separation and rejection, is almost absent.

Table 7. Number of case morphemes

| Case morpheme: | Number: | | |
|----------------|---------|--|--|
| absolute | 430 | | |
| directive | 27 | | |
| locative | 14 | | |
| accusative | 12 | | |
| genitive | 8 | | |
| ablative | 4 | | |

Given the particular status of the act of counting-out, which is distinct from speech as well as from song, I deeply regret having only written documents at my disposal. I think that the originality of counting-out rhymes would be best emphasized by an acoustic analysis of their prosodic characteristics. Counting-out rhymes seem to be hinged on the production of regular rhythmic movements, and this is true all over the world; which is probably the reason why they travel so easily. This is illustrated in the following example:

1. Entita
 2. Jini jinipa
 3. Kay sen siz
 4. Geve dizi diz
 5. Diz on suz
 6. Katuron suz
 1. 'Un deux trois'
 2. 'Nous irons au bois'
 3. 'Quatre cinq six'
 4. 'Cueillir des cerises'
 5. 'Dix onze douze'
 6. 'Elles seront toute rouges'

The Turkish version collected in Konya (1950) preserves the rhythm of the French original.

Another interesting perspective is the comparison of the deviation from linguistic standards in counting-out rhymes with that in school-children's usual language. Kâmile İmer's investigations (İmer 1987: 211-216) show that, besides sentences which are both communicative and grammatical, we find sentences that are communicative but non-grammatical, and sentences that are neither communicative nor grammatical, which she calls "masses of words", and which should be compared to the wild words of the counting-out rhyme.

Finally, the counting-out rhyme mirrors the child's constant sway between sound and meaning, which is probably a mere transposition of the link between external reality and his inner interpretation. Every wild word can therefore become language through semanticization, and, conversely, every word can become wild through desemanticization. From one variant to another, *kome balir* (wild) thus becomes *görme batır* (semanticized), whereas *bir baba laklak* (semanticized) becomes *bim bara rak rak* (wild).

A careful study of the way a child breaks up adults' words and reconstitutes new elements from snatches of speech, along with a thorough understanding of the variation which allows an automatic renewal in order to make up for the formal warping, should enable us—thanks to the counting-out rhyme—to reach a better understanding of Turkish. The counting-out rhyme is, indeed, a real language laboratory. But it goes further than that and offers an incredible amount of information in other fields.

3. Importance of the counting-out rhyme in other fields

The origin of the counting-out rhyme is mysterious and controversial. It comes from figures, which precede letters, and it therefore refers to the origins of the individual, of society and of communication. As the

name shows, counting-out rhymes point to the activity of counting. This activity is surprisingly old, and counting-out rhymes thus bear traces of the different states of the counting systems, as well as traces of inclusion or exclusion processes which enable us to define sets.

We know that the Turks have used three different systems, one after the other. The first is original in its expression of numbers from eleven to ninety-nine, as it replaces the additive process (11=10+1) with an ordinal one (bir yegirmi 'eleven'=1 out of 20, or tokuz yüz 'ninety-nine'= the ninth unit before 100); this system is comparable to others in the ancient Indo-European world. Yet around the tenth century, under the cultural influence of China, the system evolved toward the positional norm: on artuki bir 'one after ten'= eleven. As early as the eleventh century, the modern counting system based on Indian figures became common among the Turks: on bir 'eleven'= 10+1.

We will therefore have to examine carefully the enumerative series which appear in Turkish counting-out rhymes. Beside the sequence 1-2-3, bir-iki-iig (which is universal in counting-out rhymes), we notice a sequence 1-5-6, bir-bes-alti, which I cannot explain. The importance of six, which frequently occurs in counting-out rhymes, is easy to understand: six is the first perfect number (a whole number equal to the sum of its divisors, 3+2+1=6); one is the unit, the necessary starting point, except if we start counting from the base (10). But why five, if it is not preceded by four? Maybe because of its cultural weight in the Islamic civilization (5 daily prayers, 5 elements in the Mekka pilgrimage, 5 takbir in the profession of faith, 5 books in the xamsa...).

Nine is the figure which appears most often, either alone or in a sequence. This comes from the mechanical characteristics of the counting system: the last element of a series naturally draws attention; ten is the base of the counting system, and as such, it marks the beginning of a new series. Nine, then, is the last unit, and is as important as one, which is the first; this is why, for instance, the first Indian mathematicians used the word *anka*, which means 'figures', to designate the figure nine.

The number 40 occurs frequently as well, probably because it is loaded with symbolism, but also because it marks a break: you count to three (see the symbolic meaning in French), which, transposed into tens, gives 10, 20, 30; with 40, something new begins, hence such a counting-out rhyme as:

Ali Veli / kirk dokuz elli 'Ali Veli / 49, 50'.

Counting-out rhymes provide ample information in another field that is equally dependent on numbers: prosody. It will be necessary to study verse patterns: couplets, quatrains etc. as well as types of rhymes and rhythms. For the time being, all we can say is that most counting-out rhymes comprise between two lines in the shortest and twenty-eight in the longest. When a counting-out rhyme is shorter than two lines, it is either elliptic (a single element is enough to suggest the whole) or structured around syllables, and it then tends towards the call, the vocative, or the scream. When a counting-out rhyme is longer than twenty lines, it is difficult to distinguish it from a song. From this point of view, scanning is interesting, because it reveals that the line of the counting-out rhyme is divided into *darbe* of one to three syllables.

We have to study not only the form but also the contents. Countingout rhymes are so many narratives staging various characters, two aspects it would be interesting to classify. The counting-out rhyme is also a means of conveying basic knowledge, popular beliefs and social rituals. It is therefore necessary to study what parents, teachers and society as a whole convey to the child through this medium. Countingout rhymes provide information for the historian, the sociologist and the anthropologist—all the more so, as the corpus I have established, though compiled in the forties, was in fact elaborated during the early years of the Republic.

There is a last line of research which is farther from my interests, but which is nonetheless important, as it deals with what counting-out rhymes teach us about the structuring of the child's imagination, and how the child expresses his fears, his anxieties, his expectations and his wishes. We have a lot to learn from Turkish counting-out rhymes, at least in order to establish an intercultural comparison.

Conclusion

These brief reflections have enabled us to delineate the notion of the counting-out rhyme, a formula of inclusion and exclusion preceding a game and endowed with a particular linguistic form, associating a gesture to each syllable. Yet this delineation remains blurred. Of course, the core of the corpus—that is, the counting-out rhyme—can be characterized precisely enough to make it possible to invent a Turkish counting-out rhyme, on the following pattern for instance:

```
un, deux, trois / c'est toi le roi
eins, zwei, drei / du bist frei
una, dos, tres / piedra libre es
```

I can invent a Turkish counting-out rhyme which, though not present in my corpus, is perfectly possible and completely regular:

```
bir, iki, üç / oyundan güç
```

Nevertheless, the belonging to the genre of rhyme becomes more and more doubtful as we move away from this core. As soon as it loses its numeric form, the rhyme tends to merge with other oral genres: the riddle, the *tekerleme*, which opens a fairy tale, the *mâni* (to which it is tightly connected) and even, for longer forms, with rounds, lullabies and songs. It is, then, harder to identify, and requires subtler forms of analysis. Nonetheless, the counting-out rhyme remains, because of all it teaches us about Turkish language and culture, one of the keystones of the oral tradition in Turkey.

Different types of counting-out rhymes

A. Numerical

XVII

Bir iki üç dört beş altı yedi
 Bunu sana kim dedi
 Diyen dedi
 On yedi.

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1. 'Un deux trois quatre cinq six sept.'
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- 2. 'Qui t'a dit ceci?'
- 3. 'Qui l'a dit l'a dit.'
 - 4. 'Dix sept.'

Variants (31):

ANKARA (a [BIV3]; b [AI10]; c [AVII3]; d [AVIII4]; e [AX8]; f

[AXII7];

g [AXVIII9]; h [AXIX2]; i [AXXIX3]; k [BIV56]; m [BIV66])

DİYARBAKIR (r [T215]) GİRESUN (j [CV130]) İSTANBUL (s [T227])

İSTANBUL (s [T227 İZMİR (n [E6])

KONYA (1 [T11]; p [T68]; q [T171]; t [T267]; u [T309]; v [T373];

w [T419]; x [T89]; y [T499]; z [T518]; aa [T529];

ab [T529]; ac [T586]; ad [T606]; ae [T612])

MERSÍN (o [Ö12])

XIX

- 1. Bir iki üç dört beş altı yedi sekiz dokuz
 - 2. On
 - 3. Kırmızı don
 - 4. Git komşunun damına kon.
 - 1. 'Un deux trois...neuf,
 - 2. Dix,
 - 3. Culotte rouge,
 - 4. Va te percher sur le toit du voisin!'

Variants (33):

ANKARA (a [BIV2]; c [AI11]; d [AVII4]; e [AVIII5]; f [AX9]; g [AXII6];

h [AXIII1]; i [AXVIII10]; j [AXIX1]; k [AXXIX7]; m [BIV45];

n [BIV55]; o [BIV64])

ÇORUM (b [CI106]) ELAZIĞ (l [ALVII9])

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KONYA (r [T119]; s [T179]; t [T190]; u [T214]; v [T303]; w [T317]; x [T318]; y [T349]; z [T401]; aa [T420]; ab [T440]; ac [T512]; ad [T563]; ae [T563]; af [T594]; ag [T631])

MERSİN (q [Ö13])

SANDIKLI (p [Ba9])
```

B. Alphabetical

LXV

- 1. A A asma
- 2. BA BA basma
- 3. SE SE sünbül
- 4. Menekşe gül.
- 1. 'A A vigne,
- 2. BA BA imprimé
- 3. SE SE jacinthe
- 4. Violette rose.'

Variants (4):

KONYA (a [T122]; b [T278]; c [T367]; d [T418])

C. Totally wild

LXXIV

- 1. Albo
- 2. Istirbo
- 3. Nebido
- 4. Ambaro.
- 1. 'Albo,
- 2. Istirbo,
- 3. Nébido,
- 4. Ambaro.'

Variant (1):

YOZGAT (a [Gö17])

*

XCVI

1. çin pon tataki

- 2. Lâleke lespiki mandoli
 - 3. Kara çiçi kara çiçi
 - 4. Viy viy viy
- 5. Pitaçi bam bim bom
- 1. 'Tchinn ponn tataki,
- 2. Lalèkè lèspiki, manndoli,
- 3. Noir tchitchi, noir tchitchi,
 - 4. Vïy vïy vïy,
- 5. Pitatchi bim bam boum.'

Variant (1):

İZMİT (a [AXLVI66])

D. Partially wild

LXXVIII

- Anya manya kumpanya
 Bir şişe şampanya
- 1. 'Agnie magnie compagnie,
- 2. Une bouteille de champagne.'

Variants (21):

ANKARA (a [AXIII9]; b [XXVII2]; c [AXXXII4]; s [BIV])

KONYA (d [T62]; e [T128]; f [T146]; g [T201]; h [T410]; i [T175]; j [T361];

k [T421]; l [T481]; m [T581]; n [T593]; o [T514]; p [T523]; q

[T598]; r [T610]; t [T362]; u [TXXX3])

| 1. | hanya | manya | kumpanya | | (b,u) |
|----|--------|-------|----------|-------|-------|
| | anya | manya | | | (f,h) |
| | ayya | mayya | şampanya | | (i,k) |
| | hayıgo | maya | | | (g) |
| | hanya | manya | koca | Konya | (o) |
| | ayya | manya | | | (r) |
| | hanya | manya | sampan | va | (t) |

| 2. | ø | (d,j,n,o,p,s) | | |
|----|-------|---------------|----------|-------------|
| | şampa | nya | | (q) |
| | iki | şişe | şampanya | (b,c,f,k,u) |
| | yedi | şişe | şampanya | (e) |
| | bir | şişe | kumpanya | (i,l) |
| | canım | ister | şimpanya | (t) |
| | canım | ister | dondurma | (l,m) |
| | benim | canım ister | dondurma | (h,r) |
| 3. | koca | Konya | | (e,f,g,h) |
| | ister | misin | | (u) |

E. Totally semanticized

CXCVII

- 1. Testim kırıldı
- 2. Suyum döküldü
- 3. Annem dövecek
- 4. Babam sevecek
- 5. Ebelik kim gelecek
- 1. 'Ma cruche s'est brisée,
- 2. Mon eau s'est renversée.'
 - 3. Maman me battra,
 - 4. Papa m'consolera.'
 - 5. La trime qui fera?'

Variants (2):

ANKARA (a [AXXIX4]) KONYA (b [T395])

4

CXCVIII

- 1. Ya şundadır ya bunda
- 2. Helvacının kızında.
- 1. 'Soit dans celle-ci, soit dans celle-là,
- 2. Il est à la fille du marchand de helva.'

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Variants (11):

ANKARA (a [XLVI10]; b [AV6]; c [AVII10]; d [AXIV12];
e [AXIX10]; i [AI5]; j [AXIV13])

BURSA (f [AXLVIII4])

ISTANBUL (h [T250])

KONYA (g [T177]; k [T446])
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