



Journal of Balkan Libraries Union

ISSN 2148-077X

<http://www.balkanlibraries.org/journal>  
<http://dergipark.gov.tr/jblu>

**Book Review**

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*Journal of Balkan Libraries Union, Vol. 5, No. 1, pp. 7 - 8, 2017.*

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***Literature Reflecting On Stones: Tombstones Epitaphs in Macedonia Debre-Jupa Region  
(Turkish-Albenian-Macedonian)***

**by Ertuğrul Karakuş**

Istanbul, 2016

476 pages

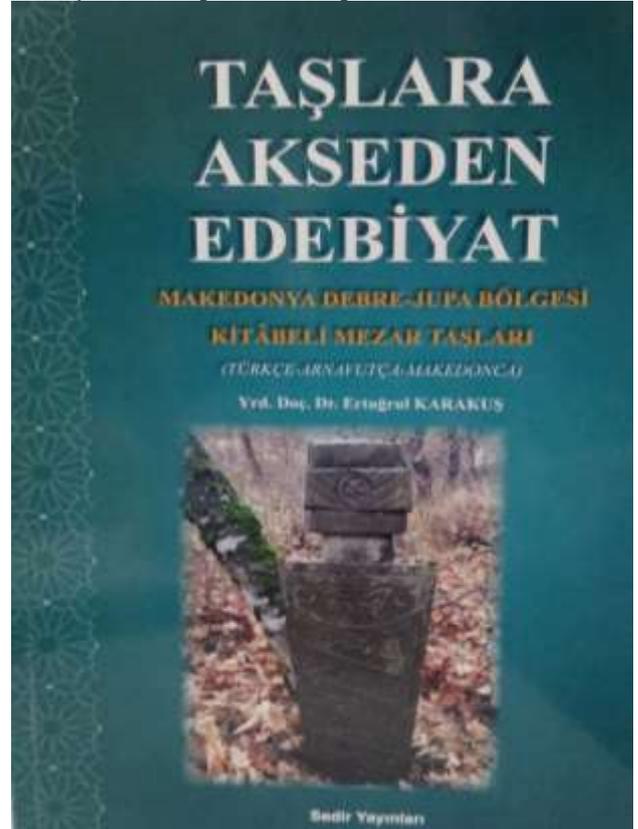
ISBN 9786053496564

Asst. Prof. Dr. Ertuğrul Karakuş, Academic Member of Kırklareli University Contemporary Turkish Dialects and Literature, is one of the leading researchers and academicians that carry out studies on Turkish Literature in Balkan geography. The author has carried out important field researches about Turkish literature and civilization in Bulgaria and Macedonia where he served duties, and he published precious works that meet the needs in the field. Karakuş studies the Ottoman tombstones in Macedonia which he defines as “the silent guardians of a civilization” in this work.

It is possible to extend the beginning of Turkish tombstone culture to pre-Islamic era in Middle Asia. However, it is a known fact that Turkish tombstone culture, upon being shaped by the Islamic belief and civilization, expanded around in Anatolia, and from there to whole Balkans. In other words, Turkish tombstone culture cannot be considered separately from Islamic civilization. Aesthetic, declamation and grace on the Turkish tombstones are the best reflections of Islamic civilization. You may see Turkish tombstones in a vast geography from Middle Asia to Balkans. If you happen to read these tombstones, you may even see that tombstones in Middle Asia or Anatolia have the same characteristics as those in Balkans. Furthermore, you witness that identical small verses related to death are carved on these tombstones. This similarity, in fact, is a manifestation of the effect of Turk-Islam Civilization that reigned in this vast geography and brought people together in the same belief pool.

It is possible to come across Ottoman-Turkish tombstones –despite all the ravages- especially in every corner of Balkan Geography, which remained under Ottoman reign for centuries. Especially in Macedonia, which is a Balkan country where there is an intense

Muslim population, these tombstones are of a value of land title for the Turkish and Muslim population there. In this aspect, it is crucial to find, excavate and transcribe the tombstones. This study is important even only with this aspect. However, the author Karakuş, does not only handle the tombstones as a cultural heritage, but he emphasizes their literary significance as well. Because the author is a literature scholar, tombstones that have literary value are put under emphasis.



For example:

“Emr itdi Hakk eyledi fermân

İrişdi ecel virmedi emân

Gençliğime lezzet bulmadım dünyadan

Cennetde murâdımı virsün Hâlık-ı Rahmân”

God ordered, made a decree,

Death reached, showed no mercy,

I couldn't find the taste to my youth

In heaven, may Holy Protector grant  
me my desire

This poem is an example of the texts that have literary value. The author connects this grace with “beauty” sensitivity which appears with the Hadith-i Sharif “Allah is beautiful, loves the beautiful.” and takes a crucial role in all works and arts in Turk-Islam civilization. According to the author, an effort of “beauty” is made both in the prayers and texts that beg for forgiveness carved on the tombstone of the person who has been encouraged to pass his life to “look good, live good” for the sake of God.

This book, like others in the same field, creates awareness about the protection of tombstones which are Ottoman cultural heritage in Balkan geography. Also, this work sets a model for making similar studies in other Balkan countries which remained under Ottoman reign for centuries. The author Karakuş also has another work titled as “The Silent Guardians of a Civilization (Macedonia Janche, Urvic), Tombstones with Epitaphs of Jelovjane Village”. The author emphasizes that he will continue to carry out similar researches covering different parts of Balkans.

Lastly, we wish such field studies to become widespread in other Balkan countries as well because such studies will be beneficial both in terms of the local history of that country and in terms of Ottoman history.