

The Genesis of the Turks

The Genesis of the Turks:

*An Ethno-Linguistic Inquiry
into the Prehistory of Central
Eurasia*

By

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THE PRONUNCIATION OF LETTERS

The Romanisation of Cyrillic letters was done in accordance with the ISO 9 transliteration, except for *ю*, *я* and *у*, which were written respectively as *ju*, *ja* and *šč*. This was kept for Mongolian, too, but words of Turkic languages using (still or previously) Cyrillic were written according to the Turkish Latin alphabet, except for Chuvash, having particular characteristics. Old Turkic forms were written as in Clauson's dictionary, unless particular forms of words were cited from other books or papers. Words of all other languages were written as in the cited sources. Proto-forms of words expressed by an asterisk * were written as offered by cited authors. Turkish, Finnish, and Hungarian use Latinic letters. Their special characters or readings are given below:

Turkish

ç like English *ch*

ğ non-stressed *gh*

ı between *a* and *i*, like Russian *byl*

j like the end of French *montage*

ö like the French *e* or *eux*

ş like English *sh*

ü like that in French *une*

Hungarian

c like *ts*

cs like English *ch*

gy like *dy*, close to *dj*

j like *y*

ly like *y*

ny the same, like the end of *Bologna*

ó longer *o* of the English *on*

ö like the French *e* or *eux*

ő longer *ö*

s like *sh*

sz like *s*

ú longer *u* like the vowel of English *moon*

ű longer *ü* of the French *une*

zs like the end of French *montage*

Finnish

j like *y*

y like that in French *une*

ā like the vowel of English *cat*

ō like the French *e* or *eux*

PREFACE

When Mr. Mehmet Cigerli of Bath, UK wrote to me in 2018 about his wish to translate my academic best-seller *Türklerin Kökeni* [Origins of the Turks] into English, I accepted but warned: The book was academic in nature, but its language was popular. I requested him to translate in that manner. Also, although it was not a thin book, I had not used all of my material for that book on the request of the publisher in order to not extend the space. Thus, I had to make additions, including a lot of new findings, to the translation. The result is a new book three times thicker than the Turkish original. The stylistic differences in the book are due to this. Almost two-thirds of the content was newly written by me, and the translated texts are also changed to a great degree. Mr. Cigerli read and reworked all of them, trying to unify these dispersed additions in a certain style, but the new sentences are clearly visible throughout the book. I apologise to the reader if that is the case. Consequently, this has become a new book and deserving of a new name that is not so very different from the Turkish original.

The word ‘Turk’ in the perception of the Western reader is associated with the Ottoman Empire, the mightiest Eastern power, controlling a great part of Southeast Europe which collapsed in the aftermath of WWI. Afterwards, the word was associated with the young Republic of Turkey, founded in 1923, which changed its course to the West, being consolidated with it by becoming a NATO member. However, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, there appeared five new Turkic states in 1991, and with the addition of the Turkish Republic of North Cyprus, the number of Turkic states became seven. The concerning public opinion, apart from the experts of the area, also became familiar with the great Turkic populations living in the Russian Federation, China, Iran, Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria and some Balkan countries, among others. Today, about 200 million people spreading from the Balkans almost to the Pacific coasts, speak in a Turkic language or dialect, constituting the main entity in the vast Central Eurasian region.

It is an impossible mission to master the entire history of the Turks, and it is very difficult to know the linguistic features of all Turkic peoples, having at least 22 literary languages. Some historians count 118 states founded by the Turks. It is very difficult to even memorise their names. A

study on their ethnogenesis is the most challenging work among all concerning historical studies. I must remind you that only Peter B. Golden dealt with it in a long essay in 2008, though many scholars expressed their views on the origins of the Turks mostly in a few sentences. Thus, there are no proper antecedents of this study except for the paper of Prof. Golden. On the other hand, the concerning scholarship seems to have taken refuge in a simplistic way, by referring to the Altaic theory. That is, the Turkic language belongs to the Altaic family, which also contains Mongolian, Manchu-Tungus, Korean and Japanese, and thus the Turkic origins should be, or rather must be sought somewhere there, for which there are not many alternatives. I would like the job to be so simple, but the Altaic theory has not yet been proven and any new scientific ideas cannot be based on facts that are not known in a sure sense. What if the Altaic theory is wrong?

A student of Turkic ethnogenesis and homeland must first of all be versed in the Old Turkic history, since it would show the course of the study. Sources of that history cannot be restricted to regional records, namely those written mainly in China and perhaps some other places in Asia. All the records of ancient and medieval times should be checked to be sure of whether there is some relevant information. We cannot *a priori* say that the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles* are not a source of Turkic history, if we, historiographers of the Turkic people, do not know about their content. To be able to detect the necessary information in the sources, the student should be talented in linguistic and cultural studies. Otherwise, he or she may not realise that a term occurring in an ancient text might be useful in the study.

In the very scant written sources, linguistic traces are of the utmost significance. Thus, we have to be familiar not only with the historical phases and peculiarities of Turkic, but also with its relations with other languages. If the usage of comparative linguistics remains within the predetermined borders (the so-called Altaic world, Iranic languages, Hungarian and a few other languages around), then the study would not advance beyond the known. The scope of the comparison should be as wide as possible and should regard all possibilities. A detective cannot disregard some clues or possibilities, and a student of this topic has to be like a detective, because we are in search of the unknown, and the known facts should not prevent us from extending our perspective. Therefore, not only readings on individual languages, but also Uralic and Indo-European level studies, among others, should be added to the list.

Historical and linguistic results should be checked against archaeological findings and be compatible with them; if not, they should not contradict

each other at least. Thus, we have to be familiar with the concerning literature and developments on archaeological studies. In Eurasia it is a very difficult task, since the material relics of old peoples and cultures in an immense region are very difficult to identify and to associate with other relics.

Ancient genetic studies have proved to be of utmost importance especially in the last two decades for those working in prehistory. Population genetics has developed in an unbelievable way. As solid data, we have to use this in our studies, and the results from historical sources, linguistics and archaeology also have to be compatible with the results of the genetic studies. It is more difficult to consubstantiate all of these than save a king placed in check by four rival chessmen at the same moment.

It is not possible for one person to deal with all of them, but somebody had to do it. I am not in a position to claim mastercraft in any of those scientific areas. I am relaxed, on the other hand, in having read almost all of the ancient and medieval sources from the east and west of the world, and being familiar with comparative linguistics, which is compulsory for a historian of ancient Eurasia. I believe that teaching at the university about the social history of old Eurasia for more than 15 years has provided me with a great accumulation on the cultural domain. Lastly, thanks to my earlier education, the language and logic of the physical sciences, i.e., genetics, were not incomprehensible for me, though I have used the genetic data in a tangential manner in this book so as not to make them completely incomprehensible for those readers who may have no familiarity with genetic issues.

Here is a new theory, or rather a new conclusion after several new theories on some concerning questions. A scientist would know that he always deals with possibilities; that is very normal, however, on the condition that he or she should regard other possibilities too. But, agnosticism should not be a *modus vivendi*. If we do not know something for certain, or it appears to be a far greater possibility compared to the others, then it should not be the base of our thesis. A defective base means an unusable building. In our case, I do not know and I cannot be sure that an Altaic family which also bounds Turkic exists. But I am or we are sure that Turkic is almost only close to the group of languages traditionally classified as Ural-Altaic, and not to another language. So, Turkic is not an isolated and independent language. Thus, it was surer and better to regard the boundaries of that greater notion, rather than to obey the Altaic theory, of which both its absence and existence wait to be proven.

I am usually careful both in writing and evaluating the data, but if there are some mistakes in this book in that regard, they belong to me entirely.

Some 30 years ago, Denis Sinor wrote that we were still at the dawn of Eurasian studies. It is a judgement of a great and avant-garde scholar of our area. We will always be grateful to the scientific accumulation of the previous generations, thanks to which we learned all the facts of Old Eurasian history that we know of. However, that should not mean the end of the story. Not only previous conclusions, but even an academic consensus can seal the debate. If we are at the dawn, there is too much to be done during the day, and I hope this book will be a humble contribution to further studies.

Indeed, further studies go on, in some ways with the help of the circumstances of especially the last decades, when people have gained endless facilities to reach knowledge thanks to the new technologies. Research, as well as communication, is now easier and cheaper. Consequently, it is not surprising that the population of 'researchers' has increased perhaps a hundred-fold in recent years. No need to underline that this process has also triggered a rise of learned illiterates. As for our working area, most of the time the results happened to be humorous and at other times jaw-dropping, as this case is left to people who are off the field and most of the times not scientific. Various inferences such as American Indians being Turkic or Proto-Turkic people who were living in Spain or Switzerland in ancient times turned the matter into a hornet's nest. These ridiculous and freaky ideas created a sceptical public opinion on this topic. Not surprisingly, the public, instead of paying attention to these illogical answers, chose to hold onto the claims which are not sufficient but which, at least have a reasonable consensus. Moreover, the claims of the conventional milieu are defending themselves by putting every new development of the second phase into the same pot with the other freaky ideas, whereas science means innovation. Both are unfavourable. The essentiality is not to find alliances on a certain matter, but instead to find sensible answers to the questions. As I will touch on this point in this book as well, there are many questions with unsatisfactory answers.

The writer of these lines, instead of reading the existing literature in many different languages and being praised by the conventional milieu by repeating the same information in a different manner, chose instead to embark on a whole new adventure because of the discomfort he has for these non-satisfactory answers. The work is tough, but the pleasant results we find take away all the tiredness. This is the beauty of science. Science is not the work of a clever man; clever men achieve their goals by following the short and easy path. A scientist, on the other hand, wastes his whole life in trying to answer the most troublesome questions.

This book is a product of a life-long accumulation. Surely, hundreds of people contributed and helped me during the collection of this content. During the writing process, Prof. Peter B. Golden and Prof. Anatoly M. Khazanov kindly and patiently replied to my endless questions. I'm lucky for having many friends to consult about Hungarian history and linguistics, including the Uralic dimension. Dr. Levent M. Yener helped me regulate especially the linguistic content in the Indo-European chapter. Denizcan Dede continuously informed me about the genetics literature. My wife was so very patient and kind as to not be angry about my working day and night. This book was brought into existence, however, by Mr. Mehmet Cığırli, who initially suggested translating it into English, and then read all that I had written again and again, not objecting to my continuous updates. Mainly Adam Rummens and Amanda Millar, among others, at CSP, I'm grateful to everybody who contributed to the appearance of this book, including the proof reader, Sue Morecroft. I must also confess that the isolated life under Corona circumstances let us find more time for our studies than is usual these days.

Izmir, June 17, 2021

INTRODUCTION

DEFINING THE TURKS

The year 1989 was an important turning point for the mutual destiny of humankind. In that year, socialism lost and hundreds of millions of people got their freedom back. Different nations, by taking strength from each other, started revolutions and dismantled the socialist system in their countries. Turkic people were the ones who benefited from this phenomenon the most as millions of Turks were living in captivity inside the Soviet Union. The strong majority of these people became independent.

Today, Turks are being represented by seven independent states: Turkey, Northern Cypriot Turkish Republic, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. There are also eleven self-governing regions in the name of the Turkic people (Karakalpakstan, Tatarstan, Chuvashia, Bashkortostan/Bashkiria, Karachay-Cherkessia, Kabardino-Balkaria, Tyva, Altay, Khakassia, Sakha/Yakutia and Eastern Turkistan/Xinjiang) and apart from these, there are many other regions which are not autonomous but the population is mostly Turkic. Because of the unhealthiness of the data (especially for China, Iran, Iraq and Syria) it is hard to know the exact population of the Turkic people, but we believe an estimation of 185 million people would most accurately capture the truth.¹

¹ This is my estimation based on the actual numbers given in <http://worldpopulationreview.com>, combined with my readings about the situation of individual Turkic groups in various countries. For an overview of this subject, see Nevzat Özkan, *Türk Dilinin Yurtları* (Ankara: Akçağ, 2002); B. Z. Avşar, F. Solak and S. Tosun, “Türklerin Demografisi (1950-2025)”, in *Türkler -I-*, eds. H. C. Güzel, K. Çiçek and S. Koca (Ankara: Yeni Türkiye, 2002), 205-241. Turkic languages and their distribution can be found at a sufficient level in Peter B. Golden *An Introduction to the History of Turkic Peoples* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1992), 19-25, 382-416. Hendrik Boeschoten, “The Speakers of Turkic Languages”, in *The Turkic Languages*, eds. Lars Johanson and Éva Á. Csató (London – New York: Routledge, 1998), 13-14, gives the number of Turkic language speaking people as 125 million in the mid-1990s however, he finds this number with highly cropped figures to be just 400,000 Turkmens in North Iraq and only 13 million

Turkey is the home of approximately one-third of the Turkic population in the world today. The interesting point is that, the homeland of the Turks is somewhere else and the area where Turkey is situated was settled by the Turks later. With the Azerbaijani and Cypriot Turks and with the minorities in the surrounding countries, whom we need to name as the Middle-Eastern and Balkan Turks, the regional population exceeds 100 million. Apart from the three independent states, those Turks who speak in the same dialect or dialectal group live in Iran, Georgia, Iraq, Syria, Bulgaria, Greece, Macedonia, Kosovo, Romania and Moldavia. Due to the dialectal unity, linguists classify them under the Western/Oghuz Turkic branch.² This sorting surely includes the Turkmenistan and Turkmen population in Khorasan (Northeast Iran) and Afghanistan as well. On the other hand, in Iran there is a Turkic group named “Khalaj” which does not speak Oghuz Turkic, although it is deeply influenced by it.

Linguistic classification is the easiest job for the Oghuz branch, but ethnic or identity names may be surprising for an outsider. For instance, of three men speaking almost in the same dialect with local variants, we call the one in Urfa (Turkey) “Turk”, the one in Kirkuk (Iraq) “Turkmen” and the one in Urmiye (Iran) “Azeri”, while the original and ancestral tribal name of all of them was “Oghuz”. This is the cumulative result of the mistakes that were not paid attention to and fixed in the course of time. From a different aspect, this case shows us an example of the possibility that people coming from the same kindred and even the same tribe, can carry different names as time goes by.

Getting away from the Turkey example, we will go to the broader and older perspective, and try to find the origin of the Turks that is in the depths of history. Even though today, the name Turkey has a constitutional background, it was naturally settled by itself. The borders were different at the time of the Saljukids and Ottomans, the places where Turks conquered and settled in masses were always known as Turkey.³ Ottomans, in

Azerbaijanis in Iran. With minimal revision and considering the population growth rate one would again find the number we suggested.

² Lars Johanson, “The History of Turkic”, in *The Turkic Languages*, eds. L. Johanson and É. Á. Csátó (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), 82.

³ Tuncer Baykara, “Türklüğün En Eski Zamanları”, in *Türkler -I-*, eds. H. C. Güzel, K. Çiçek and S. Koca (Ankara: Yeni Türkiye, 2002), 287. For instance, even in the strongest times of the Ottoman Empire, the name of the country was Turkey. The Habsburg envoys that came to Istanbul in 1530 visited “Turkischen Keiser Soleyman” (Benedict Curipeschitz, Benedict Curipeschitz, *Yolculuk Günlüğü 1530*, trans. Ö. Nutku (Ankara: TTK, 1989), 5. According to the Polish-Russian Matvej Mehovskij who wrote in the 16th century, Osman Gazi, the founder of the

particular, were named as Turks by the other people and it was an accurate name as they created the dense Turkish population living in the aforesaid region today.

The Turkification of Anatolia is a thousand-year-old process. One leg of this process was completed with the battle of Manzikert in 1071, and the other leg of the process is still ongoing. An ethnic process can never be stopped, it will either continue onwards or backwards. The onward process would mean assimilating other people that Turkic people come into contact with, and the backwards process would mean its own people would be dissolved inside different nations. While many people from different nations Turkified during the early ages of the Ottoman Empire, the Turkish tribes of Southeastern Anatolia had a rapid Kurdification in the last five centuries, and a large Kurdish population appeared out of almost nowhere.⁴

Similarly, many immigrants of Turkic descent from the Caucasus believe they are Circassians because Anatolian natives call them that. There are even some people assuming that the Turkic Karachay-Balkar, Kumuk and Nogay languages are Circassian. Here, there is no alteration in the language, but the matching of Circassians with every person coming from the Caucasus creates a perception of ethnic identity. Also, Ossetians, Chechens, Avars, and other Caucasians are wrongly assumed to be Circassian. In reality, among the people who call themselves Circassian in Turkey, probably only one out of five are Circassian proper.⁵

Around the world, populations change, and one nation takes the place of another. Except for a few examples, people do not disappear with ethnic cleansing but instead change their identities in general. When a people invade another country, the civilian people, and especially villagers, are seen as captives, and they are allowed to live. Mostly within a few generations, the old and the new start to blend, and usually the language of the majority becomes the common language. In time the other language completely disappears, and these two different peoples begin to be named as one.

Ottoman Empire, and his successors were “Turkish Kings”: Matvej Mehovskij, *Traktat o dvuh Sarmatijah*, trans. S. A. Anninskij (Ryazan: Aleksandria, 2009), 86.

⁴ While writing “out of nowhere”, surely, I know about the Kurds who were living on the Hakkari-Diyarbakır line (southeast angle of today’s Turkey) before the Turks came, but that was all. It is not possible to talk about Kurds living in Urfa, Van or Muş at that time. Those places in the region were completely and densely populated by the Armenians when the Turks came.

⁵ A. Tayyar Önder, *Türkiye’nin Etnik Yapısı*, 32nd ed. (Ankara: Kripto, 2007), 3, 293-302.

For instance, the Bulgars were a Turkic tribe. They came to the Balkans, defeated the Byzantines and founded a state on the lower Danube basin. The Slavic population of the region came under their hegemony. However, Bulgars were low in number, and in time they lost their language within the crowded Slavic population over which they ruled, and thus the Turkic speaking ruling minority was Slavicised. Conversely, their subjects adopted the name Bulgar which was, in reality, belonging to the Turkic people. For this reason, the (proto-) Bulgars of the distant past and the Bulgarians today are different from each other.⁶

The same happened in Russia as well. The Rus' were originally a Swedish tribe. They founded small states in Eastern Europe by taking under their rule the Slavs who are thousands of times more numerous than themselves. They also lost their language after a couple of generations but their name remained. While the old Rus' were Swedish, so, a Germanic tribe, the Russians today are Slavic.

The making of France is also a similar story. The old Gaul people, after they yielded to Caesar, began to quickly lose their language, and a Vulgar Latin was spread amongst them. Thus, with the influence of Latin, the language changed almost without any change in the ethnic structure of the population. Subsequently, the Franks who were a Germanic tribe became the rulers of this territory and eventually they adopted the local Vulgar Latin. Today, the people of France are Gallic descendants to a large extent, but their language came from Italy, and their name came from Germany.⁷

Some academics who believe that most of the examples happened in this way think that the same happened during the Turkification process of Anatolia as well, meaning that the new invading nation transformed the existing one and concentrated them all in one identity. More specifically, they claim that a significant number of Anatolian Turks are actually pre-Turkish natives.

However, the process in Anatolia actually happened differently. The Turkification of Anatolia refers not to the transformation of the existing

⁶ There is an abundant literature on the Bulgars. Their early history can best be read in English in Steven Runciman, *A History of the First Bulgarian Empire* (London: G. Bell & Sons, 1930). Also see the parts in Golden, *Introduction*, 95-104, 244-258. We will be back to the Bulgars in the next chapter.

⁷ M. K. Pope, *From Latin to Modern French* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1973), 1-22. Also see Jacqueline Vaissière, "From Latin to Modern French: On Diachronic Changes and Synchronic Variations", *AIPUK, Arbetisberitche, Institut für Phonetik und digitale Sprachverarbeitung* (Kiel: Universität Kiel, 1996), 62-63.

population but instead to the change in the ratio of the population with intense migrations.⁸ First of all, there is a fact of uninterrupted wars from the beginning of the 7th century within the Byzantine realm. Since Byzantium had lost the Balkans to the Slavs and Avars by the end of the 6th century, except for, what are today, Greece and neighbouring small lands, Anatolia remained as almost the unique human source for the empire, and its population was continuously eroded during the wars, first with Sassanid Iran and then with the Arabs. The powerful Bulgar state founded in 681 in the lower Danube basin also had Byzantium expend too many 'Roman' males, mostly from Anatolian troops. Though Byzantium started to visibly rise again from the reign of Basileios I (867-886) on, this did not mean an interruption of the erosion of the population. This can be observed in the westward spread of the Armenians in Eastern Anatolia, who were not much influenced by the Arabic conquests since they were usually comfortable with them from the first days on (the 640s). They, now being subjects of Byzantium, gradually moved towards the less populated Central and Southern Anatolia in those days.

The Oghuz tribes came to (Central) Anatolia beginning in the 1070s in great numbers. The great battle between the Byzantine army and the Saljukid-led Oghuz forces was fought in 1071 in the easternmost Manzikert, and only five years later, in 1076 the westernmost city of Nicea was the capital of the newly founded Anatolian Saljukid state. So, here is a numerical reality.⁹ Vryonis asserts that the Crusaders who came to

⁸ Osman Turan, *Selçuklular Tarihi ve Türk-İslam Medeniyeti*, 8th ed. (İstanbul: Ötüken, 2003), 277-280; idem, *Selçuklular Zamanında Türkiye*, 7th ed. (İstanbul: Boğaziçi, 2002), 37-44; Mehmet Şeker, "Anadolu'nun Türk Vatanı Haline Gelmesi", in *Türkler -I-*, eds. H. C. Güzel, K. Çiçek and S. Koca (Ankara: Yeni Türkiye, 2002), 269-282. The rise of the Saljukids in the mid-11th century was the most important event in Islamic history after four centuries, giving an end to the Arabic character and dominance in Islamic lands and starting the Turkish age in the Middle East and Mediterranean. Edmund Bosworth wrote in detail about the Great Saljukid period in *The New Cambridge History of Islam* (2010, Vol. III, 33-77). However, Gary Leiser wrote only a small chapter on the Anatolian Saljukids (Vol II, 301-312). *The Cambridge History of Islam* ed. by Holt, Lambton and Lewis in 1970 covers those items in a different way. B. Spuler tells briefly of the Great Saljukid period (Vol. IA, 149-158), and O. Turan about the Anatolian Saljukids in detail (Vol. IA, 231-262), in which the Turkification of Anatolia can best be read in English. Also see Mustafa Kafalı, "The Conquest and Turkification of Anatolia", in *The Turks -II-*, eds. H. C. Güzel, C. C. Oğuz and O. Karatay (Ankara: Yeni Türkiye, 2002), 402-417.

⁹ M. Fuat Köprülü, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğunun Kuruluşu* (Ankara: Alfa, 2003), 71-72.

Anatolia in 1096 constantly saw Turkish soldiers, but Christian civilians, thereby objecting to the claim of the numerical superiority of Turks who came to Anatolia.¹⁰ Surely that should be the case if one assumes that nomadic Turkic tribes stayed where they were, like settled locals and waited for the Crusaders in their villages, especially with their women and children...

We do not have the data to calculate the populations, but it is known that the Byzantine Empire could not find troops and the human resources to defend itself even in the most vital instances. In contrast to this, even small Turkish beyliks (princelings) in Anatolia were able to muster substantial numbers of soldiers and had no problem in conquering castles, which is a tough task for nomads. For example, Tutak Bey, who came in the name of Melik Shah (Sultan of the Saljukid Empire), entered Anatolia with an army of 100,000.¹¹ This number may be exaggerated; however, we should not forget that Romanos IV Diogenes (Byzantine Emperor, 1068-1071), for the battle of Manzikert, by gathering troops from everywhere, including Balkan Turks and Armenians, only managed to muster 200,000.

The sources from that period state that the rural area was totally emptied by the 'Greek' villagers. Also, cities were not completely Greek populated places either.¹² Moreover, there is the issue of the inhabitants moving away to the coasts, and from there to the Aegean islands and the Balkans as well.¹³ By the Balkans I also mean Constantinople.

Secondly, there is a difference of religion in between, which always separated people from each other especially before the era of nationalism. It is, in this manner, very important to protect the identities of different nations. Even though they newly accepted Islam, the Oghuz tribes also saw the local Christian population as religious 'others' in Anatolia. This does not exclude the fact that for about nine centuries there were countless intermarriages, but a massive Turkification or Islamisation of the natives was not the case in Anatolia. In Eastern Europe, one of the reasons for non-Muslim Turks to melt away so quickly was that they immediately blended with the natives there. The same did not happen to the Turks who came to Anatolia, and Islam has a certain role in this. As they did not so much blend in with the Greeks and Armenians, the Turks in Anatolia kept

¹⁰ Speros Vryonis, *The Decline of Medieval Hellenism in Asia Minor and the Process of Islamization from the Eleventh through the Fifteenth Century* (Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1971), 180.

¹¹ Turan, *Selçuklular Zamanında Türkiye*, 37.

¹² Köprülü, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğunun Kuruluşu*, 73-75; Vryonis, *The Decline of Medieval Hellenism*, 165, 168.

¹³ Vryonis, *The Decline of Medieval Hellenism*, 169.

their language and identity. And, in the same way, the local Christian population kept itself for about nine centuries, by the early 20th century, among the Turks.

The environment in both the Anatolian Saljukid (1076-1308) and Ottoman (1299-1922) Empires was liberal and free enough for other groups to preserve their identity, culture and language. It should be noted that the first Ottoman Parliament on March 19, 1877, was constituted of deputies from fourteen nationalities. With a population so diverse, the Ottoman Empire did not pursue a nationalist policy and instead imposed the “Ottoman” identity. The beginning of the 20th century changed this policy as the Empire with the territories lost was left with a highly Turkish population. Hence, the Empire in its last years and its successor Turkey employed a more nationalist agenda. It was because of this that from the early 20th century onwards some Greeks and Armenians remaining in Turkey, in view, have chosen to change their language and religion, and are still living with their covered identities. Among them, there are political leaders, ministers, influential businessmen and many more.

Another important issue when talking about Anatolia is the word “Rum”, which dates back to long ago in oriental literature, and is still used today in Turkey. The word primarily refers to the subjects of Rome, and has no ethnic meaning in it. However, today many people wrongly identify the Rums, Hellenised Anatolian natives, with the Greeks. Though they both speak the same language and have almost the same culture, the Ottoman Turks were aware of the difference, and used the two words to signify two separate peoples. Anatolia started to come under Roman rule in the 2nd century BC. Before the Romans came, there were around forty different nations there that were mostly foreigners to one another. From the carcass of the old Hittites and Hattians to the Lydians and Lykians in Western Anatolia, to the newcomer Phrygians and Galatians and to other scraps of nations which were once united under the Urartu in East Anatolia with roots belonging somewhere else, these lands were, so to speak, a salad of peoples.

The small size of all these peoples made it easy for them to unify under the Roman identity. It is not possible to say how long each of them held on to its language and culture but, at the end, the entirety of the Anatolian people became “Roman”. Turks essentially got the word “Rum” from the Arabs and Persians; that was the way they referred to “Romans”.

The language of the Roman Empire was Latin. This language has spread among a particular population in the Balkans, and thus today's Romanian language emerged, but we do not see such a spread in Anatolia. From the time of Heraclius (the first half of the 7th century) when Greek

became dominant as the official language in the Byzantine Empire,¹⁴ also with the effect of its being the language in the church, the other regional, small languages in Anatolia disappeared in time. In the 6th century, some people in Anatolia were still speaking ancient languages such as Phrygian, Galatian and Lykian. It is believed that the complete disappearance of Phrygian took until the 10th century AD.¹⁵

There were some who escaped Hellenisation, to a great degree thanks to geographical distance, and primarily because of their national Church organisation. Those were Armenians (they call themselves ‘Hay’) in Eastern Anatolia, Georgians (‘Kartvel’) to their north and Assyrian/Syriac peoples to their south. Apart from these, small ethnic groups in other parts of Anatolia accepted Greek, the official language of the Empire, to communicate with the church, with the Byzantine authorities and with the other groups of Anatolia. Thus, these “Rums” were united under one state and one language. Therefore, the Rums in Anatolia are completely different from the Greeks in Greece; no lineage is involved.

The Turks of the Oghuz branch under the Saljukids came to this land populated with “Rums”, and as written before, finding it mostly unfrequented/lowly populated, they captured the territory rather quickly. They didn’t commit massacres in the places they occupied. Everybody that remained, kept on living in the areas where they were. We can predict in the light of sources that the agricultural structure was damaged as the Turks were then nomads and also the people evacuated the villages and accumulated in cities for security purposes.¹⁶ The factor that separated the Turkification of Anatolia from identity changing processes in other places around the world was precisely this. Almost everywhere the peasants stayed where they were and bowed to their new masters, however, when the Turks came, the countryside emptied, and the new peasant class was made up of Turks. Excluding the Armenian population in Eastern Anatolia and the indigenous peoples in the eastern Black Sea, which were seized very late, it is for this reason that almost all of the agricultural population in the rest of Anatolia is Turkic. Of course, we must say here, that nationality is a matter of heart and culture, not genealogy.

Ethnic processes in Anatolia among the Turks did not include much mingling of the various peoples, but a change of ethnonyms. The tribal name “Oghuz” was forgotten in the early generations of the conquerors;

¹⁴ George Ostrogorsky, *History of the Byzantine State*, trans. J. Hussey (Oxford: B. Blackwell, 1968), 106.

¹⁵ Peter Charanis, “Ethnic Changes in the Byzantine Empire in the Seventh Century”, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 13 (1959), 25-27.

¹⁶ Turan, *Selçuklular Zamanında Türkiye*, 40.

the synonymous word “Turkmen” got narrower in meaning, and the superior ethnonym “Turk” spread instead. This is almost a unique case in Eurasian history. We can associate this with the Arabs, Persians and Byzantines calling these newcomers Turks, but a judgement of these people not being aware of the name “Turk” would not be right either. The ethnic organisation of the Turks in a traditional structure contains such a scheme: *Uruk* (clan) > *boy* (tribe) > *bodun* (tribal union). The historical peoples, Oghuz, Kipchak and Bulgar, and the contemporary Kazakh, Kyrgyz, etc., are indeed *boduns*. The name ‘Türk’, coming from the so-called ‘Kök (celestial) Türk’ *bodun* that had united most of the Eurasian steppes under its domination in the 6-8th centuries AD, was later used by other people to denote all *boduns*, namely, the union of tribal unions.¹⁷ Thus, every people had four ethnic names, apart from their family names. The name of the tribal union ranked first. From that point of view, the replacement of the *bodun* name ‘Oghuz’ with the ethnonym ‘Turk’ is very exceptional in Turkic history, compared to the long-enduring trends.

Today, the word Turk has a twofold meaning. With the adjective ‘Turkish’ it signifies people of Turkey and their relatives in the surrounding countries. With the adjective ‘Turkic’, one means those 185 million people belonging to the same linguistic family and having common historical and genealogical roots. ‘Non-Turkish’ Turks call themselves by their own national or *bodun* names, each having its own story and history: Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Uzbek, Uyghur, Tatar, Bashkir, etc. Except for the Turkic peoples having adopted a sedentary life earlier (Turks of Turkey, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, etc., Tatars, Uyghurs and Uzbeks), those maintaining a nomadic way of life by the New Ages (Turkmens of Turkmenistan, Karakalpaks, Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, etc.) keep even today their clan and tribal names as sub-national identities. By the way, I have employed in this book the word ‘Türk’ for the tribe or tribal union before the 6th century, and used ‘Kök Türk’ for their imperial ages between the 6th and 8th centuries.

So, the common name of this 185 million who speak the same language and have the same roots could have easily been something else, if the medieval adventure of the word ‘Turk’ had been different. For example, it could have been Tatar. This book’s name would have been “Genesis of the Tatars”, and with this, we could have defined a wide world from Kosovo to the shores of the Pacific Ocean. The common name could

¹⁷ Vladimir V. Bartol’d, *Tyurki. Dvenadcat’ lekcii po istorii tureckih narodov Srednej Azii* (Almaty: Žalyn, 1998), 24; Peter B. Golden, “Ethnogenesis in the Tribal Zone: The Shaping of the Türks”, *Archivum Eurasiae Medii Aevi* 16 (2008-2009), 111.

have remained as Saka (Scythian), Hun or something else, and the name Turk may have only been known from history, just like many tribal names that have been lost throughout history.¹⁸ It is evident here that, the existence of ethnicities is not tied to ethnic names. That is why the search for the origins of these people in history is not principally a search for the word “Turk”.

However, as we said earlier, in the last 1500 years, the tribe which had the name “Turk” and was probably low in number played a crucial and decisive role in history and that is why this name gained prominence. Old and new findings showed that this definition had a meaning and frequency far beyond the establishment of the Kök Türk state and its 200 years of lifespan. This not only refers to a prevalence between the eastern and western extremities of the Eurasian continent but also to a presence in the depths of history.

That is why, I will dwell on this name, and as it will be noticed throughout this book, the word “Turk” will be a pathfinder in this research, besides some other ethnic names. The careful following of this word may lead us to some other names of the same origin in previous times.

The academics who worked on the ancient times of Turks always referred to Chinese sources. Thus they believed that the word appears first in the 530s AD. In Iranian sources, Turk is known as a tribal name from the 420s onwards.¹⁹ There are explanations such as helmet, power, and force in the old sources related to the meaning of the word “Turk”. Contemporary scholars are coming up with some propositions leaning on these explanations or to their own ideas, such as *törük* ‘created’, from the verb *törü-* “to be created”.²⁰ These are all assumptions, and we do not have the data in our hand to give the exact truth.

¹⁸ Historical practices in ethnic nomenclature and patterns, and their historical applications among the Turks can be found in Zakiev, which I do not completely agree with: *Proishozhdenie Tjurkov i Tatar* (Moskva: Insan, 2003), 48 ff.

¹⁹ Tuncer Baykara, *Türk Adının Anlamı* (Ankara: AKM, 1998), 34-36; Golden, *Introduction*, 116-117.

²⁰ Baykara, *Türk Adının Anlamı*, 49-51; Golden, *Introduction*, 117; Golden, “Ethnogenesis in the Tribal Zone”, 99-100.

CHAPTER 1

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE TURKS

Before getting into the topic, a couple of sentences are needed on the geopolitical structure of Eurasia, the place where the old history of the Turkic people has been staged. Usually, it is believed that this word expresses Europe and Asia together, and the area where the Turkic people were for a long time in history is called Inner Eurasia.²¹ For a historian of Eurasia, however, it would correspond to the area from the Hungarian plains to Manchuria. In this book, I will accord with this definition.

This ‘inner’ Eurasia should be divided into three sections, both geographically and geopolitically: 1) The Eastern steppes containing Mongolia with its north and south which are situated to the east of the line between the Altay and Tien-Shan mountains, including Eastern Turkistan. 2) From there to the Caspian Sea, the Middle steppes, or Western Turkistan. 3) Starting from the Caspian plains including the Hungarian plains and stretching to the foothills of the Austrian Alps, are the Western steppes. To the north of this area, there is a forest belt. The south is closed, sometimes with desserts and sometimes mountains, thus it is separated physically from the south of Asia. In the western parts of this internal continent, the Caspian Sea, the Caucasus, the Black Sea and the Danube River are natural borders with the south.

The history of the Turkic peoples is usually commenced with the East Asian Xiong-nu/Hun Empire. However, it is understood today, that there is nothing wrong in starting to talk about Turkic history and culture with the Saka (also referred to as Scythian) Empire. The ethnic and linguistic identity of the Sakas is subject to great debates. We’ll spend a chapter on them. The Sakas, a key nation in the midst of the first millennium BC, had established dominance in a large area starting from the Chinese borders and stretching to the Carpathians. They were the people who founded the first known Eurasian state. In the 7th century BC, they went to the Middle East and kept the area in their hands for as long as 28 years. After being

²¹ Denis Sinor, *Inner Asia: History, Civilization, Languages*, 3rd ed. (Bloomington: Indiana University Publications, 1987), 1.

defeated by the Medeans with trickery, while retreating, some of their subjects took refuge in the area which is today the Hakkari Province of Turkey. After preserving their culture for centuries, they mixed with the local people, but we can still see today the marks of Sakas in Hakkari.²²

Oğuzname, which is the saga on the origins of the Oghuz Turks, seems to be based on the events of the Saka period. Oghuz Khan, the eponymous ancestor of the Oghuz union, is indeed not the name of a person. It means the Khan of the Oghuz tribes, so, it points to the founding father. As the Oghuz were a nation of Western Turkistan, the events in the saga are also set in the area around the Caspian Sea. The conquest of the Middle East by Oghuz Khan in the legend corresponds perfectly with the Saka conquests of the Middle East in the 7th century.²³

Some of the legendary motives transferred to the Oghuz people²⁴ through Sakas were also probably transmitted to Iran by the Parthians who, coming from Western Turkistan, routed the last Macedonians in Iran and founded a state from 250 BC onwards. These elements were later adopted by the Persians and included in their *Khodanamağ* (Book of the Kings) books. The Persian books have not survived, but their content is known primarily thanks to Tabari and Ferdowsi of the Islamic period, who wrote voluminous books on the mythological and legendary past of the Iranians. It is because of this that some activities of the legendary sublime emperor Faridûn of the golden age of Iran resemble those of Oghuz Khan, the legendary sublime emperor of the Turks. Isn't it interesting? Not only

²² Veli Sevin who excavated in the region, first wrote an article about his findings (V. Sevin and A. Özfirat, "Hakkari Stelleri: Doğu Anadolu'da Savaşçı Çobanlar – ilk not" *Belleten* 65, 243 (August 2001), 301-330), and then turned it into a book.

²³ Contrary to the claims identifying Oghuz Khan with the Xiong-nu ruler Mo-tun (209-174 BC), I suggested looking for him in the Saka world, following some previous proposals (Osman Karatay, *İran ile Turan: Eskiçağda Avrasya ve Ortadoğu'yu Hayal Etmek*, 4th ed. (İstanbul: Ötüken, 2019), 257-272; idem, "Oğuz Han'ın Kimliği ve Tarihi Kişiliği Üzerine", in *Çağdaş Bilimler Işığında Oğuz Kağan Destanı*, ed. A. R. Özdemir (Ankara: Kripto, 2014), 21-36). The legend with various versions contains a bulk of events that can be traced in real history, and a great many of them are accumulated in the Saga age developments. I'll touch briefly on this topic in the Saka chapter.

²⁴ According to the Chinese chronicle *Chou-shu*, written in the 620s, ancestors of the (Kök) Türks descend from the So state located to the north of the Xiong-nu (Liu Mau-Tsai, *Çin Kaynaklarına Göre Doğu Türkleri*, trans. E. Kayaoglu and D. Banoğlu (İstanbul: Selenge, 2006), 14; Peter B. Golden, "The Ethnogenic Tales of the Türks", *The Medieval History Journal* 21, 2 (2018), 10). János Harmatta, "A türkök eredetmondája", *Magyar Nyelv* 95, 4 (December 1999), 391, identifies this So people with the Saka.

the stories but also the personage of the great ruler of the Iranian golden age are associated with the Turks.

The Great Saka confederation collapsed in the 5th century BC. Other tribes and confederations arose to take its place. The most important one amongst them was the Sarmatians who, from the 5th century BC onwards, spread from today's Bashkiria to the west, and became an important people in East European history. Below, we will talk about them in detail in a separate chapter.

Probably at the same time as the Sarmatians, in the eastern steppes which the Saka never ruled over, the Xiong-nu arose. Even though Chinese sources refer to them as early as the 9th century BC, their history that we know of starts around the 4th century BC, and even then, it is dark. Around 209 BC, the famous Mo-tun became their ruler and took control of today's Mongolia along with its north and south. He carried his nation to the area west of the Altaic ranges. Various tribes in the South Siberian belt that we can see as ancestors of the Kyrgyz, Suvar and Ogur people came under the Xiong-nu rule.²⁵

In the 2nd century AD, the Xiong-nu power was gone. The eastern steppes were largely emptied. While many of the defeated Huns accumulated in the western parts of Central Asia, those who had surrendered to the Chinese took control of Northern China in time, and founded many states. Thereby, the Chinese who terminated the Xiong-nu Empire, in the end, came under the rule of the Huns who had once yielded to them. However, as time went by, these Huns would eventually be assimilated under Chinese culture.

Some of the Huns who slid to the west founded the White Hun Empire on the land which is now Uzbekistan and Afghanistan. Because of the ruling dynasty, they are also called the "Ephtalites". The course which was

²⁵ The most fundamental books on the Great Xiong-nu/Hun Empire belong to Ögel in Turkish, see Bahaeddin Ögel, *Büyük Hun İmparatorluğu Tarihi* (Ankara: MEB Yayınları, 1981), which is a detailed work of political history, and to Kradin in Russian, see Nikolaj N. Kradin, *Imperija Hunnu*, 2nd ed. (Moskva: Logos, 2001), which is a new book not ignoring social history as well. In English, more than half of the book of Nicola Di Cosmo, *Ancient China and Its Enemies. The Rise of Nomadic Power in East Asian History* (Cambridge: CUP, 2002), 161-312, deals with the Xiong-nu, with less political history and more analysis of the Chinese policies of the north. Turkish historiography unhesitatingly combines the Xiong-nu with the later Central Asian and European Huns. There are, however, objections on the identification of the two. Recently, Étienne de la Vaissière recollected the material and debated the Xiong-nu–Hun relation ("Huns et Xiong-nu", *Central Asiatic Journal* 49, 1 (2005), 3-26). He confirms that the later Huns are only a continuation and branch of the once Xiong-nu.

conceptualised as the Iran-Turan rivalry is best fit for the Sassanid-Ephtalite contention. It is observed that these Huns were often involved in Iranian affairs. The existence of the White Hun Empire was ended by the K k T rks around 557 AD. Some of the Huns on the other hand, passed through northern Aral to Europe (375 AD); their power increased with the additional Turkic and foreigner tribes that joined them on their journey. They gained control of the Black Sea steppes by defeating the Alans and the Goths there. They continuously shifted to the west and made today's Hungarian plains the centre of their empire. They exercised their power over the whole of Europe by repressing the East and West Roman Empires and the non-allied Germanic tribes. The Empire was at its zenith around the 440s when Atilla was the ruler. After his death in 453, the Empire started to lose its power, and finally collapsed in the year 469, when its remnants retreated to easternmost Europe.²⁶

Irnek, the youngest son of Atilla, was the ruler of the retreating Huns. They seemed to continue their polity in the Northern Caucasus, by exercising their power over the local Turkic and non-Turkic populations. Amongst them, the most important one was the Bulgars, and it is for this reason, it seems, that even though the ruling dynasty stayed the same, its name changed from Hun to Bulgar in the course of time. In earlier generations, sources use both names simultaneously for the same people.²⁷ This Hun-Bulgar union did not evolve into a big state in the first generations, and during this time, Eastern Europe turned into a playground for many independent Turkic tribes. This situation lasted until 558 when firstly the Avars, and then the K k T rks who were chasing them, came. The former took control all over Central Europe, while the latter were spreading their hegemony over the Caucasus.

From the fall of the Xiongnu in 216 AD to the foundation or rather proclamation of independence of the K k T rk Empire in the year 551, there was no great empire in the Eastern Steppes, except for some transient

²⁶ There are countless studies on the European Huns in Western languages, the two eminent monographs in English being those of Otto J. Maenchen-Helfen, *The World of the Huns. Studies in Their History and Culture* (Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1973) and Thompson, *A History of Attila and the Huns* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1948).

²⁷ The Hunno-Bulgar affiliation represented in sources is due to the aforesaid political situation. Though both are Turkic peoples, the Bulgars were not a tribe of the Hunnic union, but an independent *budun* (tribal union). They came to the northern slopes of the Caucasus likely from the South of Central Asia, visibly from Transoxiana. See O. Karatay, "The Bulgars in Transoxiana: Some Inferences from Early Islamic Sources", *Migracijske i Etni ke Teme* 35, 1-2 (2009), 69-88.

politics like the Xian-bei and Juan-juan, just as there weren't any in China, which was divided by several states founded mostly by foreigners from the north. Even though sometimes the rising powers were spread over a large area, their dominance was short-lived. One of these powers was the folk who were called Apar/Avar by the Kök Türks, and Juan-juan by the Chinese. These people, whose rulers were called 'qagan' (Old Turkic word for 'emperor'), were believed to be Mongolic, but this is not certain. At least we can say that the European Avars having the same name, fleeing from the Kök Türks in the 550s, were not Mongolic, since the linguistic material that they left, though not in a satisfactory amount, points to them being Turkic.²⁸

Another issue is the relationship of the Avars/Juan-juan in the east with the Ephtalites or White Huns. The latter were defeated by the Kök Türks in the mid-550s and escaped to Eastern Europe, where they appeared in 558 with the name Avar. A Kök Türk ruler informed the Byzantine envoys that those Avars fleeing to Europe were 'pseudo-Avars'; the real Avars were in the east and crushed to their death by the Kök Türks. This has been much debated in academic studies. Czeglédý showed that the Juan-juan, White Huns and Europeans Avars shared the dual ethnonym Avar-Hun and were thus of the same stock.²⁹ Pohl, the author of a brilliant monograph on the European Avars, separates them from those in Mongolia, underlining that the latter could not have migrated to Europe in the light of the events recorded; and associates the former with the White Hun fugitives in Europe.³⁰ Therefore, it seems more correct to see the Avars in the east as folk sharing the ancient Hunnic cultural and ethnic heritage. The before-mentioned people of the Türk tribe or tribal union living in the Altay Mountains were their subjects before their independence in 551. They routed the eastern Avars; and the survivors ran away from them and sheltered in China and Korea. A couple of years after

²⁸ Gyula Németh, *A Honfoglaló Magyarság Kialakulása* (Budapest: Hornyánszky Viktor, 1930), 103-104, believes this with certainty. Golden, *Introduction*, 110, accepts the recorded words are mostly Turkic, but warns that the Avars were indeed a confederal entity, thus also containing many other elements.

²⁹ Károly Czeglédý, "From East to West: The Age of Nomadic Migrations in Eurasia," *Archivum Eurasiae Medii Aevi* 3 (1983), 117-120. Golden, who translated this essay from Hungarian to English, shares his stance: *Introduction*, 109. See the discussion in Walter Pohl, who objects to some details of the debate: *The Avars. A Steppe Empire in Central Europe, 567-822* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2018), 38-46.

³⁰ Pohl, *The Avars*, 36-37.

this, the Kök Türks attacked the White Huns/Ephtalites/Western Avars as well, and took control of West Turkistan by the year 557.

Envoys of the fugitive Avars appeared in the Byzantine court in 558, having defeated the peoples to the north of the Caucasus. Not being sure of the Kök Türks chasing them, they moved further west and settled in what is today Hungary by 562. They took control of a considerable part of Central Europe, deported the Germanic tribes, Gepids and Langobards from there, and established their own empire, which would continue, by the end of the 8th century, as a mighty player of international affairs in Europe. Avars were responsible for the making of today's Balkans. As they were low in numbers, they used the crowded Slavic population of the region as a human source against the Byzantine Empire. Thus, Avar-led or mostly independent Slavic gangs³¹ destroyed the Balkan provinces of the Empire, and killed or wiped out the native inhabitants in the last decades of the 6th century. Since the Empire could not stop them, they eventually settled in the Balkans.³² Thus not only was most of the Balkans Slavicised, but also several peoples like the Thracians, Illyrians and Dardans disappeared from history.

Even though the Kök Türk Empire in a short time ruled over a large area from Korea to the Black Sea, its existence was not stable or long. It was not only frequent revolts that weakened the state, but also in the year 576, after just 25 years, the trans-Eurasian empire was split into two political entities as the east and west wings. In the year 630, both entities were dissolved because of the internal rivalries mostly provoked by the Chinese. The East Kök Türks came directly under the control of China. After an interregnum of 50 years, the state was founded again in the east in 682, but it remained within the borders of the eastern steppes and could not control West Turkistan, except for a few punitive expeditions. The famous Orhon runic inscriptions are from this period. Eventually, this second Kök Türk state was also collapsed in the year 744 with the revolt of three other Turkic tribal unions (Uyghur, Karluk and Basmil), which were under its rule.

³¹ Florin Curta concludes that Slavs had no 'chiefs' before c. 560 (*The Making of the Slavs. History and Archaeology of the Lower Danube Region, c.500-700* (Cambridge: CUP, 2001), 332). This coincides with the coming of the Avars and supports the idea that the latter organised, used and 'abused' the Slavs in their imperial exertions. However, they were unable to control all Slavs pouring into the Balkans, and thus sometimes we see Byzantium and Avars together against the Slavs, especially against those entering the peninsula from the northeast.

³² Ostrogorsky, *History of the Byzantine State*, 81.