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Book Review

Central Asia Reader: The Rediscovery of History

H. B. Paksoy, ed. New York: M. E. Sharpe, 1994. 206 pp.

The collapse of the Soviet Union and the creation of new independent states has generated great interest among scholars and politicians in the history and contemporary situation in the region. Central Asia is not an exception to this case. Viewed in this light, *Central*

Asia: The Rediscovery of History is a welcome contribution toward introducing the western scholarly community to the politics of Central Asia.

The book is composed of a number of articles published by Turkic language specialists from 1904 to 1990, and of official documents from Central Asia and Azerbaijan. The integration processes of the Turkic peoples, which began during the Soviet period, are now in full force. In 1990, the heads of the Central Asian republics signed a treaty for economic and cultural cooperation. The treaty was also signed by Tajikistan, the only representative of the Indo-European family in Central Asia. The integration envisioned a united economic space between Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgystan. In the 1992 and 1994 summits held in Ankara and Istanbul, Turkey and five newly independent Turkic states confirmed their desire to cooperate in the economic and political arenas. Therefore, attention to Central Asian problems and the publication of several scholarly works from this region are symbolic, to some extent, of the attention being paid to the significance of a common Turkic tradition and the possibilities of a meaningful integration in the "Great Turan."

The book begins with Ayaz Malikov's "The Question of the Turk: The Way out of the Crisis." This chapter actually sets the tone for the whole book by making a case for the need to attract the attention of scholarly and political circles from around the world to the problems of the Turkic nations and their suffering under Soviet rule. His statement that "our peoples do not have their own history" seems to be true, for all of the nations (not only the Turkic ones) in the former Soviet Union had to study mainly the history of the Russian state at the expense of developing their own historical consciousness. No doubt the author is right in his claims about Soviet violations of the rights of Turkic communities in Russia, especially the right to study in their own languages at schools and universities and even the right to listen to programs broadcast by western radio stations in their native languages. Arguing that the political history of the Turkic nations extends backwards for more than two thousand years (p. 4), Malikov calls for the right of Turkic peoples to seek unification without fear of being charged with advocating "Pan-Turkism" (p. 6). The author appeals for the formation of a terminological commission that will be entrusted with seeking the unification of the Turkic language.

All of the other chapters—Muhammad Ali's "Let Us Learn about Our Heritage: Get to Know Yourself," Zeki Togan's "The Origins of the Kazakhs and Ozbeks," and Kahar Barat's "Discovery of History: The Burial Site of Kashgarli Mahmud"—are attempts to prove the Turkic origins of Central Asia since antiquity. Ali's attempt to connect the term "Turan" with the ethnic term "Turkic" by referring to the *Shāh-nāma* of Abul Qasem Firdousi is quite novel, if not eccentric, as is his attribution of the Iranian language's dominance in Central Asia as being the result

of the infiltration of the Tajik-Persian languages and the simultaneous supplanting of hypothetical Turkic languages. There are also interesting thoughts on the identity of traditional Tajik and Uzbek ceremonies, cookery, and so on, and a mention of the strong friendship between Ali-Shir Navoi and Abdulrahman Jami.

In my opinion, Togan's study is more serious. It reflects a deep knowledge of the historical genealogy of the Kazakh and Uzbek nations and provides a sustained and well-founded chronology. The list of tribes (branches of Ozbek, Kazakh, and Mangit-Nogay) composed by Togan is a real contribution to our understanding of the region's history and is quite informative on the separation of the "Kazak khans" from the Uzbek nation during Sheybani-Khan's governance, which may be considered a point of departure in the formation of the contemporary Uzbek and Kazakh national identities. The evolution of Sheybani-Khan's fifteenth-century conquest of Central Asia is also revealing. He was defeated and killed some years later by Iranians. The year 1497 is considered by many scholars in Russia and in the former Soviet Union to be the year when the Uzbeks arrived in Central Asia.

The chapters "Exposing the Murderer of Alpamysh" by Naim Karimov, "The Burial Site of Kashgarli Mahmud" by Kahar Barat, and the chapter by Memmed Dadashzade on "Ethnographic Information Concerning Azerbaijan Contained in 'Dede Korkit Dastan,'" are of great interest to those interested in the cultural monuments, ancient epic literature, and folklore of Central Asia.

The last two parts of the collection, titled "Rediscovery of Political History" and "Rediscovery of Political Identity," comprise several chapters, commentaries, and reports. These can be used by specialists of Central Asian history as a base for serious analysis of contemporary regional events. These chapters present the programs of some Turkic political organizations such as the Turkic Federalist Party and Birlik (a party now persecuted in Uzbekistan). The stories of the Togan Basmachis in H. B. Paksoy's "Excerpts from the Memoirs of Zeki Velidi Togan," are presented in a way that is absolutely different from the typical and derogatory Soviet historiographical presentations: Such Soviet labels as "gunman" are replaced by "fighters for national liberation" in the epic of "Koroglu" (p. 140).

The analytical chapter "Three Types of Policies" by Jusuf Akchuyra is very useful to researchers of Pan-Turkism and Pan-Islamism. It lists interesting data on the evolution of a common Turkic self-consciousness in the Ottoman state, its transformation into Pan-Turkism and then into Pan-Islamism with the appearance of the Caliphate movement and the ideology of the Young Turk movement. The chapter also highlights the relationship between Russia and the Turkic nations as well as the geopolitical situation in all Turkic regions.

The book also contains several reports from the local press concerning ethnic relations and conflicts, including Uzbek–Meshketian Turks and Kyrgyz–Tajik clashes, unrest in Ala-Ata (1986), the arrival of troops into Baku (1990), the repatriation of the Crimean Tartars, and the antinuclear movement in Kazakhstan.

It is important to note that the publication of this collection of works by Soviet Central Asian scholars is particularly useful, as it allows western students to familiarize themselves not only with data concerning Central Asian political processes but also the way in which they are accepted and interpreted by regional scholars, politicians, and the public. It also provides a rich historiography and documentation of the problems of Turkic and other peoples in the former Soviet Union.

Two critical points are worth mentioning. First, while the overall censorship of the Soviet system prohibited publications in local languages and a correct historiography and heritage of the Central Asian peoples, this situation improved somewhat during the final years of the Brezhnev period, a time when some native language publications as well as some native nationalist-oriented historiographies found their way into publication. Second, some of the contributions, such as those by A. Malikov and M. Ali, though interesting and useful, are handicapped by their doctrinal tone and biases. For instance, as has been mentioned, all non-Russian nationalities, including the Ossetians and Byelorussians and not just the Turkic peoples, have faced problems concerning the inaccessibility of education in their native languages. Moreover, within the nationalities themselves the dominant ethnic groups at times compounded Russian cultural biases with their own. For example, the Tajiks in Uzbekistan suffered under the cultural onslaught of the Soviet fatherland and also endured local cultural deprivation (i.e., language) by the dominant Uzbeks.¹

The attempt to identify Turanian with Turkic from Firdousi's *Shāhnāma* on the basis of the consonance of the words (pp. 11-12), while innovative, lacks credibility. This masterpiece of Tajik–Persian literature embraces the time and space of the Sasanid period, and sometimes even more ancient times that were far removed from the time of the real dominance of the Turkic Kaganat. In fact, the Turkic Kaganat's influence and power over the region was limited to collecting tribute, since Kaganat was an amorphous state extending from the Black Sea to the Korean peninsula.

The selectiveness of sources of arguments also points to a doctrinal (Pan-Turkic) approach in the analysis. For instance, M. Ali mentions many times the works of the Russian historian V. Bartold especially to prove when Turkic dominance was established in Central Asia, although the more correct date is 999, and not the sixth century, when the Samanid state declined under the pressure of the Karakhanid Turks. Nevertheless, he cites Mahmud Kashgarli (p. 12) to present Samarkand

as a Turkic city, ignoring Bartold's evidence: "There were already in the time of Alexander Makedonsky records which confirmed that the Sogdian people of Iranian origin lived along the Zeravshan River." Furthermore, Bartold indicates, "they had some cities, among them Marakanda, contemporary Samarkand, which belongs inalienably to the Iranians."² In 1925 Bartold also confirmed: "The native population of modern Turkestan belonged to an Iranian group of peoples . . . for 1500 years since the 6th century B.C. two Iranian nations were being mentioned: Sogdians and Khorezimians."³ Therefore, the chapter's chronology of the history of Turkic nations in Central Asia does not correspond to the facts, nor does it attempt to identify Turans with Turkic on the basis of the *Shāh-nāma*.

The call for the unification of all Turkic nations into one, though it might be an admirable wish, is based on a narrow interpretation of their history and is more the reflection of hope than reality. This hope has to take into account the reality of contradictions and discrepancies that have existed at all times at the level of republics within the Soviet Union,⁴ as well as in the tragic ethnic clashes between Uzbeks and Meshketian Turks in Fergana in 1989,⁵ and in Osh in 1990 between Uzbeks and Kyrgyz. These clashes startled the world with their cruelty and the number of victims. Unfortunately, there are plenty of examples of this kind.

Nevertheless, this book enables one to formulate a perception about the tendencies in the political and scholarly circles of Central Asia and Azerbaijan in the last years of the Soviet Union. It also suggests possible directions for the development of the region's political dynamics and, as such, is a useful addition to the growing literature on Central Asia.

Endnotes

1. See R. Rasov and Farkhad Djuraev, "Regional Federation," *Sukhan* (in Tajik), September 1990.

2. V. Bartold, *History of Turkestan* (Tashkent: 1922), 114.

3. V. Bartold, *Tajiks: Historical Survey* (Tashkent: 1925), 102.

4. Farhad Juraev, "The History of National Territorial Separation of Central Asia and Kazakhstan," *Izvestiya of Tajik's Academy of Sciences* (Dushanbe: 1989), 30-36.

5. See Paksoy, *Central Asia Reader*, 167-69.

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