THE POLITICS OF SCRIPT REFORM IN SOVIET TURKMENISTAN:
ALPHABET AND NATIONAL IDENTITY FORMATION

A Thesis

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ABSTRACT

12 April 1993 Turkmenistan's President Saparmurat Niýazov declared that Turkmenistan would reform their Cyrillic alphabet to a new Latin based script. On the same day the Mejlis (Assembly of Deputies) passed a resolution in support of Niyazov's decision. The transition, which was scheduled to take place between 1993-1995, would further the aims of the 1990 Language Reform and the Education Reforms planned for October 1993. The newly independent country of Turkmenistan, which had declared its sovereignty on October 27, 1991, in reforming its social and political realms from Soviet to Turkmen added script to the agenda. This was the third time since Turkmenistan came under Russian domination (1880s) that an entirely new Turkmen script was adopted.

Script codification was a defining aspect of post-1917 Turkic identity formation. Political extra-code factors dominated the preferences in developing most of the Turkic writing systems as nationalism and Sovietism politicized similarities and distances between the Turkic dialects. A distinctive Turkmen writing system would have assisted in differentiating the Turkmen from other Turks. Conversely, by sharing the writing system of other Turkic scripts, the Turkmen would have taken a step toward designating themselves culturally and politically as "Turks" rather than as "Turkmen." Neither was ever fully implemented as the political winds shifted from
support for development of reformed-Arabic scripts in each Turkic region to a push for Latinization, and later Cyrillicization. The Soviet Turks' brief period of cultural self-determination was ended in the late 1920s. However, successive script and alphabet reforms confirm the enduring import of script symbolism in the Soviet Union. As does the fact that when independence came again in 1991 many of the same issues were picked up by the Turkic Central Asians and the question of how similarities between their writing systems would affect their autonomy was one of them. The intellectual work and nationalism which can be found in the Central Asian republics today are actually drawing on and recapturing an earlier period of self-determination; the 1920s and the period of Arabic script reform when script was a preeminent symbol of self-definition and national identity construction.
Dedicated to Muratgeldi Söyegow and Tagangeldi Täçmyradow

Hormatly Professor Muratgeldi Söyegow'a

we

Professor Tagangeidi Täçmyradow'a bagyşlandy
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VITA

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PREFACE

The focus of this project is the Soviet Republic of Turkmenistan (1924-1991) and the politics of the script reforms that took place there in the years up to delimitation (early 1920s), through Cyrillicization in the late 1930s. The Turkmen experience was shared to one degree or another by every group in the USSR and even the Uighurs in Mongolia, and so this should serve not only as an excerpt of Turkmen history, but also as an example of one pivotal aspect of Soviet politics which shaped the national identities of these peoples.

I have limited my primary source research to focus on the Turkmen experience. I did not pursue primary sources from other Turkic regions. I have not included any information about the Turkmen of Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran, Syria, Turkey or the Azerbaijani SSR (Trukmans).

In an effort to focus on the details of script reform, I have limited my discussion of literacy campaigns and education. While these topics are of immense importance and are certainly not divorced from the issue of script reform, their complexity makes them deserving of separate examination.

For transliteration of Russian, I have used the Library of Congress format. To facilitate the transliteration from Turkmen to English I have relied upon the most recently created (1993) Turkmen Latin alphabet. Turkish is written in its own Latin alphabet, with many letters in common with Turkmen, where c=[j], ş= [sh], ç=[ch],
ō = same as German, ü = same as German, Turkish ı and Turkmen y = i in nation,
Turkmen ɨ = softening consonant, ā = a in bat, ň = [ŋ]. I have attempted to show the
 citations written in the 1920s Turkmen Latin script as they appeared in that script
where b = i in nation, y = [ü], ō = [ō], ň = [ŋ], ə = [ä].
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

The Politics of Language and Identity

It is not the literal past, the facts of history, that shape us, but images of the past embodied in language.

Friel, Translations

Iazykove stroitel'stvo, "language construction" or "language building," was the Russian/Soviet term for language planning. Through strategic orchestration of language and other cultural monuments, the Soviet political elite and educated nationals intended to manage, manipulate and in some cases formulate cultural identities for varied purposes such as enhancing national culture, boosting education systems, modernizing, westernizing and most particularly, building socialism. With respect to manipulating and creating societies, Soviet language policy was not so

3This was part of the sovetskoe stroitel'stvo [soviet construction] which would establish soviets throughout the Union and natsional'noe stroitel'stvo [national construction] a sub-division of the above "which would create a network of national soviets across the Union." These entities along with Narkompros RSFSR [Commissariat of Education], via its Komnats [Nationalities Committee] (until 1934) handled nationalities policy which encompassed language policy. Terry Martin, "An Affirmative Action Empire: Ethnicity and the Soviet State, 1923-1938," PhD dissertation, University of Chicago, pp. 5-7
different from language policy or nation-building strategies found throughout much of modern history and in such diverse regions as Norway, Estonia, Mongolia, Iran, the United States and Germany. However, Soviet language policy differed from these examples in that the Soviet ethnic or cultural groups for whom languages were formulated were not autonomous. Instead the discussion were largely dictated by the central, Russia-based government in the manner of a colonial ruler. One focus of this study will be how script reform in Turkmenistan was related to the Soviet policies aimed at engineering a socialist empire.

Language plays a great role in marking, constructing, defining and recognizing identity. In the modern era it has become one of the key definers of nations. Victor

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6 Hobsbawm, 1995, pp. 49-79. Hobsbawm explains that, while there are differing approaches to nations, nationalism and nation-building, they are aspects of the modern era.
Friedman explains that the symbolic value of language is a source of identification for the speech community: Language is politically invested, and the administration of it reflects the way a group defines itself, or is defined in the case of regions without autonomy. The same can be said about the writing system with which the language is written. For example Moldova moved between a Latin-based and a Cyrillic-based script throughout its history of being caught between dominating powers: Byzantium, the Bulgarian Empire, the Ottoman Empire, Russia, and Romania, with which it is culturally and linguistically linked, and finally independence in 1991. Fishman calls such non-linguistic influences "extra-code factors"; they are what play the greatest role in language planning as it is linked to nation building and constructing identities. While we can also say that language issues are cultural matters, it is often impossible to determine where culture ends and politics begin. Language is constructed, planned, and administered for largely political reasons.

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Cyrillic is the original script for Romanian/Moldovan as a result of its use by the Orthodox Church.

Language planning is the standardization, codification, or modification of language and its components, that is, script, alphabets, orthography, and so on. The two major spheres of language planning are "corpus planning" or development of the language structure for political, economic or cultural reasons and "status planning" defined by Fishman as "the authoritative allocation of languages to particular functions" or social roles, for example Turkmen used at home, Russian at work. This thesis deals with the history of corpus planning of written Turkmen from the late 1910s to the early 1940s and how identity issues influenced that planning.

The link between script and identity politics was a repeated component of all Turks' modern experience beginning more than a century ago and continuing today. In the nineteenth century, when the Russian Empire took hold in Central Asia, the region's Turks were using the Arabic script. During the early years of the Soviet

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13. It was also an aspect of their pre-modern experience, as it was with the adoption of Islam that they began to employ the Arabic script. But in modern times it is linked to politics and nationalism in ways not previously seen.

regime, the Turkmen, following the lead of the Azerbaijani Turks and Tatars, experimented with modified forms of the Arabic script in an effort to have the script better reflect the characteristics of their spoken language. In 1928, most Soviet Turkic and Tatar people shifted to the Unified Turkic Latin Alphabet. By 1940, Turkmen, along with most other languages falling within the borders of the USSR, began to use a Cyrillic-based script.¹⁴

In each script era, language was tied to issues of identity and politics. Beyond linguistic expression script took on a symbolism of self-expression. As an aspect of alphabet reform, Turkmen intellectuals debated whether to assert themselves culturally as Turks, Turkmen, Muslims, Turkestanis, or Soviets. The history of Turkmen scripts reflects the history of cultural, social and political development among the Turkmen. In documenting the history of Turkmen corpus-planning, this thesis will examine influences of extra-code phenomena on the Turkmen alphabet as an aspect of the development of the Turkmen national identity.

In the modern era, as languages became forms of national self-expression, and defining aspects of peoples, language planning emerged as an aspect of political orientation and national development. The nineteenth century was an active period of language reform and standardization when both literary languages and spoken codes became critical cultural claims for groups trying to modernize, sometimes westernize

¹⁴The exceptions were Armenian, Georgian, Abkhaz, Yiddish, Estonian, Lithuanian and Latvian.
or more often solidify a national identity. As polities emerged from disintegrating empires (Ottoman, Russian, Hapsburg) in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, national language issues became intertwined in developing denotations of national identity. This is not to say that language awareness, or identity related to language, did not exist before the nineteenth century, but that during this period language and alphabets began to have bearing on society as the standardization of language and orthographies became specifically linked to nationalism.

Such orthographic and nationalistic fervor appeared most strongly among the Turks in Russia in the late nineteenth-early twentieth centuries. After years of feeling that their culture had been stifled under Tsarist rule, Central Asian Turkic intellectuals began to experiment with modernization, westernization and assertion

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16Throughout, for lack of a more specific term, I shall use the term intellectuals to refer generally to the educated individuals who were involved in language planning. For other discussions of elites/intellectuals, see S.K. Sonntag, "Elite competition and official language movements," *Power and Inequality in Language Education*, J.W. Tollefson ed., (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 91-111; Joshua Fishman, Joan Rubin, Björn Jernudd, Jyotirinda Das Gupta, Charles Ferguson (eds),
of identity (including Turkification). In the twentieth century several Turkic groups undertook Turkification of the Arabic alphabet, in order to better reflect the spoken Turkic dialects. They perceived unmodified Arabic alphabet, which has letters for three long vowels only, and the means of conveying a limited number of short vowels by diacritics, to be an inadequate means of graphically representing the variety of phonemes to be found in Turkic dialects. Hence, without altering their adherence to Islam, they wanted to Turkify the sacred script to reflect their spoken codes more accurately.

The 1917 dissolution of the Russian empire allowed the Central Asian Turks to question their cultural status, and to expand and recast debates over alphabet, language, and identity which had begun in the Imperial era. Language and alphabet reforms, becoming politically charged, involving both local intellectual cadres and Moscow party leadership, who were not only geographically distanced from each other but ideologically as well. Turkmen and other Central Asian Turkic intellectuals\(^7\) grappled with alphabet issues in their efforts to foster Turkic culture.

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\(^7\)Here is a case of intellectuals acting as legislators, as defined by Edward Said, although they were not always selfless, objective, men of integrity as Said defines the manner of a true intellectual. Edward Said, *Representations of the Intellectuals: the 1993 Reith Lectures* (NY: Pantheon Books, 1994).
and assert their Turkic-ness.\textsuperscript{18} The Turkmen intellectuals had to ask themselves if they should even be considering Turkifying their Arabic-based script. Or, should they be going a step further to distinguish their language as one distinct from other Turkic dialects by \textit{Turkmenifying} the alphabet? Next they questioned the merits of adopting the "international" Latin-based script. This led to questions of whether they should risk cutting themselves off from their literary heritage by abandoning the Arabic script.

Although other periods of language and script reform followed, this was the only time (1920s) during the Soviet period that Central Asian Turks enjoyed some cultural self-determination. Available records of debates and opinions by the intellectuals who worked on language and script reveal a sense of possibility in working toward a self-defined Turkmen national culture. They weren't simply rejecting their colonial past, but seizing their future.

\textsuperscript{18}Throughout this study "Turkic-ness" and "Turkmen-ness" mean, respectively, expression of membership in Turkic culture, and expression of membership specifically in Turkmen culture, a sub-set of Turkic-ness. To Turkify/Turkification and to Turkmenify/ Turkmenification are each respectively related to bringing cultural elements in line with Turkic-ness and Turkmen-ness.

This phrasing is first a translation from Turkic [\textit{Türklük, Türkmençeleşdirmek}] and then a borrowing in English from Eley and Suny's explanation of "Gussii-ness" which they define as "the quality of cultural belonging to the Gussii tribe." They expound on this point saying, "the social reality of the Gussii's developing existence as a tribe is located in specific historical processes of cultural redefinition, in which the people concerned have 'homogenized their own traditions' and achieved a 'reworking of myth through time'," Geoff Eley and Ronald Suny, \textit{Becoming National A Reader} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), fn. 13, p. 33, citing John Lonsdale, "When did the Gussii (or any other group) become a tribe?" \textit{Kenya Historical Review}, Vol. 5, No. 1, (1977), pp. 123-33.
In Turkmenistan, as in the other Turkic regions in the early 1920s, the intellectuals formed alphabet committees, attended congresses and made their debates public in the newspapers and journals of the day. The debates became contentious and the scholars divided themselves into academic factions. Their linguistic concerns became pivotal issues of national identity formation as language became a critical cultural claim. Alphabet reform had originally centered on distinguishing Turkic (Self) alphabetically with respect to Arabic (Other). It soon evolved from a defining marker between Turk and Other into a critical cultural claim by which Turkic groups classified themselves, for example between Turkmen (Self) and Uzbek (Other), illustrating that the "Self" is not an immutable, uniform bloc, but a dynamic, multifaceted entity.

The Turkmen language reformers could not agree on the similarity they should allow between their newly reformed Arabic script and those of other Turkic groups. A distinctive Turkmen writing system would have assisted in differentiating the Turkmen from other Turks; Tatars, Uzbeks and Ottomans are specifically mentioned. Conversely, by sharing the writing system of other Turkic scripts, the Turkmen would have taken a step toward designating themselves culturally and politically as "Turks" rather than as "Turkmen." Because of this the number of vowels and the use of diacritics evolved from linguistic criteria (intra-code phenomena) into political considerations (extra-code). As a result, by 1924 an Uzbek-oriented reformed Arabic alphabet was being used to print Turkmen newspapers and journals, while a Tatar-
oriented script was being used in Turkmen textbooks. The dispute was not about language or script alone, but about national identity and self-definition.

Language, like any aspect of culture, can, and often does, become politicized. Hence, language usage, language policy, and reforms to writing systems are often manifestations of political concerns rather than simply linguistic ones. The designed distinctiveness of writing systems as a differentiating factor between communities, or more common, the sharing of writing systems to symbolize similarities (linguistic or other) between speech communities, is an example of intra-code phenomena (pure linguistic concern) receding while extra-code phenomena (sociological significance of the language) advances.¹⁹ This sociological advancement is sometimes termed "politicization" although germane factors apart from politics may include economics, education, or religion. Victor Friedman uses the term "language ideology,"²⁰ that is, language is politically invested.

The relevance to non-linguists is that language and script are reservoirs of a community's culture. The histories of language and script, their transformations and shifts, may assist scholars in tracing a more comprehensive history or in understanding parallel cultural issues. As one study of the history of language in England and Ireland explains, since language and script are vehicles for political and social change,

¹⁹Fishman, 1977, p. xii.

scholars use the "historical vicissitudes of a language [and script] as a way of reading the moral and political fortunes of its speakers." 21

Michael Silverstein defines the politicization of language as "linguistic ideologies [which] are any set of beliefs about language articulated by the users as a rationalization or justification for perceived language structure and use." 22 This would include considerations such as adopting vocabulary from another language or dialect; purging vocabulary (usually borrowed); imbuing one of multiple languages used by a community with a significance others lack, for example, for use in bureaucracy, military, education, or literature; declaring a language "official"; or employing any combination of these in order to achieve a specific goal, such as national recognition, cultural alignment, or cultural distinction.

A more detailed definition of the ideology of language is Paul Friedrich's categorization of the "three most valuable meanings of ideology,"

1. notional, i.e. notions or ideas that members of a society hold about a definable area (e.g. non-elite evaluations of a given language as 'useful', 'beautiful', 'prestigious', etc.) [ours, yours, sacred].
2. pragmatic, i.e. a system for promoting, perpetuating or changing a social and cultural order (e.g. native elites seeking to establish a standard language as a tool and symbol of a nation state),
3. critical (henceforth hegemonic), i.e. a tissue of rationalizations and false beliefs used to mask political domination (e.g. the elites of one group seeking to delegitimize the language of another group by


claiming it has no grammar or no vocabulary of its own) [imposing a script to support a *lingua franca*].

In the case of the Turkmen these categories of ideology held preeminence in different periods. Between the time the Turkmen (then Oguz) tribes arrived in the region now recognized as Turkmenistan and the Russian invasions of the 1880s which led to its eventual recognition as "Turkmenistan" (*Turkmeniia* in Soviet Russian, Transcaspia in the Imperial period), the primary Turkmen identification was tribal, or even clan. Language standardization did not begin until the twentieth century, so linguistic notions during this early period would have been with respect to the tribal dialect as simultaneously defining them as speakers of Turkic, of the Oguz dialect of Turkic and of a specific tribal variant (Teke, Yomut, Ersari). The greatest consideration was likely the usefulness of communication with allies and enemies. This phase corresponds with Friedrich's first meaning of language ideology as a non-elite view.

Friedrich's second phase took place among the Turkmen during the beginning of the twentieth century. Often in coordination with Turks from other regions, members of the intelligentsia worked to Turkmenify the Arabic alphabet in order to better reflect the spoken language. These were attempts at orthographic

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23Paul Friedrich, "Language, Ideology and Political Economy," *American Anthropology* 91, p. 301-309. I would like to acknowledge Professor Victor Friedman, University of Chicago, for bringing these works on linguistic ideology and their possible applications to my attention; cf. Friedman, 1997.

24Although always with regard for their over-arching Turkmen-ness and eponymous leader Oguz.
standardization, although with no one tribal dialect prevailing. Efforts to reform, influenced by the earlier work of Jadidists (whose modernizing efforts will be discussed below), were pragmatic and intended to increase both the Turkmen-ness of the script as well as literacy. As a Turkmen scholar explains,

The cadres insisted on beginning with solving the practical problems of the Turkmen literary language: eliminating illiteracy in the masses, providing text books for newly established schools, seeing newspapers and journals on the right path....

The "critical" third phase listed by Friedrich is found in Turkmen history in two script eras. The first was the era of Latinization (instituted 1928). Turkmen and other Turkic national elites abandoned their work on reformed Arabic scripts in order to promote adoption of Latin-based alphabets. After the First All-Union Turcological Congress in 1926, energies were channelled into promoting a unified Turkic Latin Alphabet which would draw the Turkic groups away from their Muslim past and closer to their "international" future. Less than a decade later Moscow’s elite decided that Cyrillic scripts would displace this Latin alphabet. In the first instance, the hegemony of the centralized government combined with a small group of Turkic intellectuals who require the Turkic language reformers to abandon their work on reformed Arabic scripts for the sake of "progress" and "internationalization"; a few elite Azerbaijani Turks played critical roles here. In the second era, Cyrillicization

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26 As will be discussed below, their attitudes toward this shift are not always clear.
(instituted 1940), the hegemony is completely from without and is more pervasive; there is not even the appearance of local authority.

Political extra-code factors dominated the preferences in developing Turkic writing systems as nationalism and Sovietism politicized similarities and differences between the Turkic dialects. None of the proposed reformed Turkmen Arabic scripts were ever fully implemented as the political winds shifted from support for reformed Arabic scripts to Latinization (with internationalism), and later Cyrillicization (with Sovietization). The Soviet Turks' brief period of cultural self-definition ended in the late 1920s. However, when independence came again in 1991 many of the same issues were picked up by the Central Asians Turks (and Tajiks who returned to the Arabic script); the question of how similarities between their writing systems would affect their autonomy was one of the issues which again politicized script. The expression of Turkic identity through script holds as great a place in Turkic identity formation today as it did during earlier eras.27

*Early Turkic Identity: Markers of Turkic-ness and Turkmen-ness*

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When [God] was speaking about the signs of the Hour and the trials of the end of Time, and he mentioned the emergence of the Oghuz Turks, he said: "Learn the tongue of the Turks, for their reign will be long."

Kashgari Mahmut, Diwan Lugat at-Turk

Examination of script evolution involves study of identity. In every era of script and language reform the Central Asian Turks contemplated how the identity they were constructing at that time related to or reflected the shared Turkic and/or Muslim culture. For example, in the late-nineteenth century when Tatar Jadidists talked about Turkic identity and Central Asian Jadidists about a Turkestan identity (excluding Tatars, Azeris, Ottomans), each suggested a different unified language and orthography. In the 1920s the Soviets chiseled national groups and literary languages out of the Turkic, supra-identity "Türk". Yet the Turks continued to debate the degree to which they wished to assert a common Turkic-ness as opposed to sub-Turkic identities such as Turkmen, Tatar and Uzbek. Moscow's promotion of the "Sovetskii chelovek" [Soviet man] ideal resulted in "Türk" being labelled a term threatening to the stability of the Union. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, even while promoting national culture as evidence of their right to sovereignty Turks again began to focus on shared Turkic heritage. The 1992 International Turkic Language Congress which was attended by Turks and Turcologists from around the world is indicative of

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the enduring sense of common Turkic heritage and its correlation with language and script.29

There was not only a rich pre-Russian Turkic identity, but a pre-Islamic one, and in each 'identity era' (pre-Islamic, Imperial Russian, Soviet, post-Soviet) a corresponding Turkic script crystallized. Pre-modern Turkic history reveals foundations of these identities and scripts, and the matrices of modern Turkmens' self-definitions. It also illustrates that Turkmen history and the evolution of their identity can not be dissociated from that of other Turks. Here I mean Turks not only in Central Asia as it is defined politically by the legacy of the Russian Empire/Soviet Union, (modern Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Kirghizstan, Kazakhstan and Karakalpakistan)30 but also the Azerbaijani Turks in the Caucasus and Iran, Tatars in the Crimean and Volga regions, Uighurs, Kazakh and Kirghiz in Eastern Turkestan (today in modern China),31 Turkmen in Iran and Afghanistan, as well as Turks in the Turkish Republic and former Ottoman lands. In addition to the regional history they share, recognition of common cultural monuments evinces the shared Turkic heritage


30Maria Todorova similarly defines the Balkans as a region linked by its experience of Ottoman vassalage. Maria Todorova, "Identity or Destiny? Reflections on the Balkanness of Greece," Twelfth Thomas E. Leontis Memorial Lecture in Modern Greek Studies, The Ohio State University, 22 April 1999.

In Soviet parlance "Srednie Azia" [Central Asia] excluded Azerbaijanis, Tatars and even Kazakhs. Tajiks are of course equally entitled to inclusion, but as they are of Iranian heritage, I do not deal with them here.

31East Turkestan (Xinjiang in Chinese) is in today's northwestern China, where many Turkic activists are now struggling for their own national self-determination.
so critical to their identity.32 One of the best examples are the actual monuments which contain examples of the first Turkic script: the Orkhon-Yenisei stelae. These earliest known runic-script, Turkic inscriptions (7th-8th c.), located primarily along the Yenesei and Orkhon rivers in what is today Mongolia, were left behind when the Turks began to migrate westward during the ninth and tenth centuries.33 The stelae found there exhibit the first script known to have been used by Turks (a 40 character alphabet thought to have been derived from the Aramaic script through Sogdian) and reveal the names and activities of several Turkic groups,34 including Oguz.

32"Cultural monuments" includes literature, poetry, traditional legal codes, written histories, textiles and general lifeways. For example, Kutadgu Bilig is literature in the "Mirror for Princes" genre, comparable to Machiavelli's The Prince in western culture.


Commonly claimed literary figures: Fuzuli, Navai, Görögöl, Garacaoglan.

33Talat Tekin, A Grammar of Orkhon Turkic (Bloomington, 1968). There are other known monuments, but these are the best known.

34Stefan Wurm, Turkic Peoples of the USSR (Oxford: Central Asian Research Centre, 1954), p. 10-11. Wurm writes that there is (sketchy) evidence of Turkic sentences found in Chinese sources as old as the fourth century A.D.
Markers of Turkic heritage are noteworthy because even though regional history is shared with neighbors (Iran, Afghanistan, China, Russia), a complex, communal culture imparted a self-awareness among pre-modern Turks -- and questions of the degree to which individual Turkic groups should recognize and contribute to this common culture arose again and again, especially in the 1920s, 1930s, and the 1990s. In the late nineteenth century when identity became a factor in Turks' efforts to assert themselves culturally, questions of their Turkic-ness arose. They began to ask themselves whether they wanted to affirm modern, distinctive identities (Azerbaijani, Kazak, Tatar), their fellowship in the Islamic world, or a common Turkic identity reflecting membership in a cultural continuum which stretches from western China to the Mediterranean. The rest of this chapter will endeavor to illustrate some of the traditions Turks recognize as shared cultural monuments by which they define themselves as Turks and from which Turkic-ness stems. It will also address the foundations of the sub-Turkic Turkmen identity. Turkic-ness and its markers, shared cultural monuments, were important to language/alphabet reform and national identity formation because they were the referents of debates. When the Turks asked themselves how they should design their literary languages and from where they should draw their lexicon, the answers were the original ancient dialect, Chagatay (literary language), or the language of the poets Fuzuli and Magtumguly.

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35This is not to say that similar traditions can't be found elsewhere, but that they are recognized by the Turks as self-defining criteria of their identity as Turks. See Jo-Ann Gross, ed., Muslims in Central Asia: Expressions of Identity and Change (Durham: Duke University Press, 1992), especially Murial Atkin's piece.
The Soviets used these cultural elements to create republican societies and then the independent Central Asians employed them again to foster nationalism. Central Asian cultural monuments remain vital markers of Turkic past and present.

With respect to alphabet reform, culture came to have a broad influence on the direction the intellectuals were proposing to go. For example, some orthographers wished to build a modern lexicon based upon the 'innate richness of Turkmen.' They suggested using classical Turkmen poetry, or if that was insufficient, borrowing from shared Turkic literature. Others insisted that a socialist vocabulary must borrow from Russian and other 'international' languages. These options led to questions of spelling and whether special letters to spell foreign words should be added to the alphabet. Turkmen does not employ the [zh] phoneme, but Russian does in common words like zhurnal and zhandarm [gendarme]. How would the Turkmen orthographers represent Russian words, or words from old Turkic or other dialects? Would they be spelled as pronounced by the community from which they came? Or would the foreign words be molded to represent the Turkmen speech pattern. For example, plan (Russian) pylan (Turkmen), kommunist (Russian), qamynyst (Turkmen).

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36Tagangeldi Täçmyradow, Muhammet Geldiewiñ Ömri be Döredijilli (Aşgabat: Ylym, 1989), pp. 22-30

37In the 1993 Turkmen Latin script, a special character was created solely to depict Russian words beginning with [zh]. Conversation with Will Dirks, member of Turkmen Language Project, Indiana University.
These orthographic questions were of course tied to much larger issues of national direction and the degree to which Soviet Socialist Republics would draw (or be allowed to draw) on their past heritage. As chapter two will show, the opinions of intellectuals on these questions of past heritage and future cultural progress became vital to national identity formation and grave issues for the individuals involved. Here, a brief discussion of what some of the cultural monuments and shared Turkic heritage consists of will illustrate what Türklik [Turkic-ness] meant to Turkic nation builders; no doubt these are still meaningful to the Turks of today.

Cultural Monuments

There is a wealth of Turkic literature and poetry, but dastans may be the most important as they are rich examples of pre-Islamic culture, combined with Islamic overlay, still highly regarded and recited today.

[Dastans are] ornate oral history -- and prime representatives of the Turkic oral literature of Central Asia. [They are] the principal repository of ethnic identity, history, customs, and the value systems of its owners and composers.38

Until the practice of writing them down began, dastans, set mostly in verse, were sung by professional reciters.39 Although the title for this occupation varies


39 This individual may perform other duties, for example healing. Possible titles include ozan, bahçe, akin, aşık, shaman, kam. Kagan Arık, "Cultural Identity and Practice Among the Xinjiang Kazakhs," paper delivered at University of Washington, Seattle, May 1999. For a detailed study of the role of bahçe see Arık, forthcoming PhD dissertation.

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regionally, the social role is recognized across the Turkic continuum. *Dastans* were suppressed during the Soviet period (beginning in 1950s),\(^6\) however, with independence, there is a resurgence of interest in reviving them as vital cultural elements. The Kirghiz have been most active in revitalizing the dastan *Manas*, even naming the state university after the epic's hero, *Manas*.\(^4\) The Turkmen too are working to resuscitate their dastans as critical cultural claims of their Turkic-ness. Annakurban Aşırof, director of the Turkmen Manuscript Archive, writes of the Turkmen "*Garajaoglan Dessany* [dastan] that "it is known by all Turkmen, even those living in Turkey."\(^2\)

Legal codes guide communities and provide uniformity. For Turks both Islamic (*Shariát*) and pre-Islamic codes remain important. *Töre* is a pre-Islamic, traditional code, ethical guide, or in American parlance, set of social norms, which all Turks have recognized at one time or another. In many regions it existed alongside the *Shariát*. Among the Turkmen "it was quite evident that *Shariát* was overruled by

\(^6\)Paksoy, 1989, *passim*.


the *Adat (Töre).*"\(^4^3\) Mehmet Saray, one of the few scholars to write about Turkmen in English, records several applications of one aspect of *adat*: the Turkic form of governing by assembly of elders (*aksakals*, literally 'whitebeards'), tribal representatives or general assembly, which is an important aspect of Turkic social organization.\(^4^4\) Published copies of *Adat* are being sold in Turkmenistan today.

Turkic cultural signifiers also include a highly developed vocabulary to define social relations and familial ties. Although not every region used every term, they are indicative of a larger Turkic identity and shared social history;\(^4^5\) most of these terms are still employed today.

An *urug* is comprised of *oymak*, which are made up of *aras*, a composition of *soy*, itself subdivided into *tire*, constituted by *ara*: *urug > oymak > aras > soy > tire > ara.*\(^4^6\)

\(^4^3\)Mehmet Saray, *The Turkmens in the Age of Imperialism* (Ankara: Turkish Historical Society Printing House, 1989), p. 41. The Arabic term *adat* was adopted with the influence of Islam and some Arabic traditions may have merged with *töre*. Today *adat* is the more commonly used term.


\(^4^5\)Z. V. Togan *Bügünkü Türkili Türkistan ve Yakın Tarihi* (İstanbul, 1981).

\(^4^6\)H. B. Paksoy, "The Basmachi (Basmachestvo) Movement and Z. V. Togan: The Turkistan National Liberation Movement," Paper presented to The Ohio State University Center for Slavic and East European Studies and Middle East Studies Center, 4 February 1999, p. 5.

The Turkmen, and others, also use *kabyla* which translates as "tribe." The modern Turkmen dictionary (1962) and the Turkmen-Russian dictionary (1968) also contain *urug*, *tire*, and *taýpa* and equate the definitions with *kabyla.*
These terms indicate that while Turks were not a nation in the modern sense, there was self-recognition as a structured Turkic community. Although this does not necessarily mean that they were teleologically destined for nationhood, their pre-modern group consciousness did play a significant role both in who the Turkmen and other Turks became under the Soviet government and who they are shaping themselves as today in independence.\textsuperscript{47}

Apart from the common Turkic language and early script, oral traditions and legal codes, each group's individual histories entail migrations, warfare, adoption of Islam, lifeways related to the geographic location and language development. It is these varied experiences which lead to a sense of sub-division into groups such as Turkmen, Kazakh and Uzbek. Tajik specialist Muriel Atkin writes,

In Central Asia, before the Soviets launched the nation-creating process in the 1920s, the overwhelming majority of indigenous inhabitants considered themselves part of the Muslim community but also saw that community as subdivided into groups which were different and, not infrequently, mutually hostile.\textsuperscript{48}

Hence the ability to call on both a Turkic/Muslim identity, as well as a Turkmen one.

\textsuperscript{47}I am not advocating the concept of "radical discontinuity" (Duara, 1996, p. 153) between the self-definition and self-organization of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and earlier periods (for the Turks or anyone else), but rather suggest that while aspects of the past are sometimes destroyed and the modern is distinct, the modern builds on the pre-modern. For a good discussion of the idea that modern societies are not the only ones which created self-conscious communities, see Prasenjit Duara, "Historicizing National Identity, or Who Imagines What When," \textit{Becoming National} Geoff Eley and Ronald Grigor Suny eds. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 151-177.

\textsuperscript{48}Atkin, 1992, p. 47.
Language

Language is another prominent cultural marker which became symbolic both of the shared Turkic culture as well as the changes in expression of that cultural unity with the rise of sub-Turkic nationalisms. Ingeborg Baldauf illustrates that Turks were aware of the great differences between their own languages and those of their neighbors (Russians, Afghans, Persians, Chinese), and they would refer to their language as Türki in opposition to the Other's tongue. Yet, they were likely less concerned with nuances among themselves. In the pre-modern and early modern periods, all Turks spoke dialectical variations of Türki and it is only with Imperial Russian influence that language became a political issue. Once it did, it remained a preeminent one.

In the 1897 census, "the criterion of nationality [was] language. The romantic concept of a nation as being the whole of persons united by a common mother-tongue was introduced into Central Asia where it met with several not clearly shaped indigenous concepts of nation (as being the whole of persons united by either religious belief, attribution to a professional group, citizenship or tribal links)."

49Baldauf traces the historiography and political implications of language and identity terms and problematizes their applications. She does not give a definitive answer for every question about these terms, but relates how various speakers' perceptions of them changed according to time and place.

50During the Soviet period Uzbeks and Tatars were Others to the Turkmen, and language further distinguished them as language became further distinguished, but during the early Imperial period Other was non-Turk.

tiurkskii, "in a more narrow sense of the word, was one of the indigenous names of the recent Turkic lingua franca of Central Asia." However, when, in response to Russian dominance, the Turks began to assert themselves culturally, especially via jadidist publications, some began to refer to a "musulmon tili" [muslim language]. Baldauf writes that although the term was used during the years of the Turkestan ASSR, "the idea of attribution to Islam as being a defining factor for one's national identity, paralleled Jadidist socio-political influence in its rapid decay between 1918 and 1924." Here Baldauf alludes to the decline of supra-national identities (Muslim, Turkestan) with the rise of nationalist sentiment encouraged by Soviet administrative policies and enhanced by the delimitation (razmezhanie) of borders which created the Central Asian republics.

The question of where primary identity affiliations lay and how to express them was one all Soviet Turks grappled with. Their view of language and alphabet as preeminent expressions of identity led to the complex questions which arose during alphabet reform, especially Arabic script reform. In 1920 a newspaper article complained about this dilemma.

even young people who had mastered the principles of Soviet power and the Communist Party [did] not know in what form to present their own national


53Another term for Türki.

54Baldauf, 1991, p. 82. For a discussion of Jadidism, see below.
culture...They [could] not even solve such an elementary question as what to call their people \textit{narod} -- Turk, Uzbek or Muslim.\footnote{Zhizn' natsional'nostei, 2 September 1920, cited in Fierman, 1991, p. 69. Ironically, this was written in Russian.}

The intellectuals faced similar problems. Should the alphabet be considered, and called, a Muslim one? If so to what degree should they alter the sacred script? Or perhaps they should Turkify the Arabic script so all Turks could use a common alphabet to express their shared language. Nationally oriented alphabets would leave no room for other variants or the accompanying sentiments. If Turkmen and Uzbeks established their alphabets as Turkmen and Uzbek, the critical cultural claim expressed by those alphabets would be nationality, not a common Turkic identity.

In 1924 Soviet leadership demarcated the Central Asian borders in loose correspondence to pre-existing ethnic or political identities now designated as "national" regions; the Turkmen Soviet Socialist Republic, Uzbek S.S.R., Tajik Autonomous S.S.R., and Karakalpak Autonomous Oblast (region) within the Kirghiz (Kazak) A.S.S.R. of the Russian Soviet Federation of Socialist Republics.\footnote{Tadjik ASSR became a union republic in 1929 and in 1932 Karakalpakistan became an ASSR and was made a part of the Uzbek republic. Seymour Becker, \textit{Russia's Protectorates in Central Asia Bokhara and Khiva, 1865-1924} (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968), p. 309.}

Adrienne Edgar writes,

the Turkmen were unlikely candidates for nationhood. A traditionally nomadic people fragmented into lineages and scattered among a handful of Soviet republics and neighboring states, the Turkmen in the early 1920s lacked national consciousness or any of the trappings of the modern nation-state.\footnote{Edgar, 1998, p. 2.}
While their self-consciousness was not "national" it did exist with respect to their Turkmen-ness. Not only did they experience the above mentioned Turkic culture and history, but, in accordance with Murial Atkin's statement, their sub-Turkic culture and history allowed them to recognize themselves as a separate group.

_Turkmen sub-identity: Oguz_

The modern Turkmen recognize themselves as descendants of the Oguz, originally a political term referring to members of the Gök Türk empire on the Chinese border whose name is attributed to an eponymous leader, Oguz; it is also the name modern scholars apply to the family of south-western Turkic dialects (Turkish, Azerbaijani, Turkmen).\(^{58}\) In addition to Chinese sources and _dastans_ (especially _Dede Korkut_), we know of the Oguz and their history from the Orkhon Stelae (ca. 732). There is some academic debate over how the Oguz came to be the called Turkmen, one commonly accepted explanation is,


Golden concludes that it was a disturbance in Mongolia which set off a "chain reaction in the Mongolo-Turkic steppe, the end result of which was to send most westward elements yet further West" and led to battles for nomadic pasturage. (p.81-83) The implications of this reached the Rus', Peçeneks, Magyars, and ultimately the Byzantines. He demonstrates the results of the Oguz movement on the face of Europe and Asia Minor. (p.81) Because of the Oguz shift westward there are Turks in Azerbaijan and after the westward movement of the people on the Pontic steppe, eventually in Constantinople. Hence, Oguz are recognized as ancestors of the Turkmen, Azerbaijani Turks, Ottoman Turks and Seljuks. For Oguz relation to Seljuks see Gary Leiser, ed., *A History of the Seljuks* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1988, p. 22.

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...the term 'Oghuz' was gradually supplanted among the Turks themselves by Türkmen, from the mid-tenth century on, a process which was completed by the beginning of the thirteenth. The Turcomans [sic] were those Turks, mostly but not exclusively Oghuz, who had embraced Islam and begun to lead a more sedentary life than their forefathers. 59

The eleventh century lexicographer Mahmud al-Kaşgari recorded that the "Oguz are the Turkman." However, Ayni, an official in the Mamluk court between 1398-1451, commenting on Kaşgari's statement, perhaps more precisely explains that the "Turkman were branches of the Oguz;" 60 that is, not only Turkmen descended from the Oguz.

When the Rus' encounter this group, they are still Oguz. In fact, "in 965, the Oguz took part in the Rus' attack on the Khazar cities that heralded the collapse of the Qaganate as a major regional power. They joined the Rus' again, in 985, in an attack on Volga Bulgaria." 61 By the time Imperial Russia begins to conquer Turkic regions, migrations and branching off of the Oguz have left the region Russians come to call

59The Book of Dede Korkut, 1974, pp. 9-11. In any discussion of Islam in Central Asia, one must remember that Islam existed (and exists) concomitantly with and became conjoined to aspects of earlier belief systems such as Zoroastrianism, Buddhism and Tengri animism.


Transcaspia populated primarily by Turkmen. The Russian acquisition of Turkmen regions was completed in 1885.\(^6\)

Before the onset of Russian Imperial aggression, despite cultural affinity, the Turkmen had lacked political unity and were often fighting amongst themselves for the natural resources so vital to their existence.\(^5\) They identified primarily with tribe or clan, yet continued to see themselves as overarchingly Turkmen.\(^4\) The Persian threat was the catalyst which ultimately unified many of the tribes under one recognized leadership for the first time in the mid-nineteenth century, and later Russian invasion kept most of them allied even after their unifying leaders had died. In the 1850s Nur Verdi Khan and Kuşid Khan, two local leaders, each gained popularity not only among their own people but also among other Turkmen tribes. They assumed joint

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\(^5\)"The migration of the Tekes from the Mangishlak to the Balkhans and the Kopet-Dagh area in Akal, and thence to Merv oasis in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, had created a series of problems among the other Turkmen tribes. The Yamuts [sic] were the main settlers in the Balkhans before the Tekes moved into the area. The Tekes pushed the Yamuts out of the Balkhans to the south-west, the Atrek Valley, where the Goklens were settled. The expelled Yamuts occupied half of the Atrek Valley. This created much ill-feeling, which lasted for more than a century, between the Goklens and the Yamuts, as well as between the Yamuts and the Tekes. These conflicts between the Turkmen tribes kept them disunited, and had always emerged as an advantage for their enemies...," Saray, 1989, p. 56.


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leadership over the Teke Turkmen (the largest tribe) and worked together to include the Yomuts, Göklens, and Salors in a united effort against mutual enemies (Khivan Khanate, Persia and later Russia).  

In addition to this history which was experienced essentially separately from the regional history of the other Turks, Russian colonization also occurred distinctively. For example, in 1881 at the Battle of Gök Tepe, the Russian commander Skobelev, in an attempt to prove Russian ascendancy over the resilient Turkmen, slaughtered thousands of women and children. The painful memory of this exists today and is marked by the January 12 holiday as well as the extravagant mosque which has been erected near the site of the massacre. These experiences have fostered a sense of Turkmen-ness which in some respects are more important to the Turkmen than their Turkic-ness.

Turks, like all peoples, have always been in a position to draw upon a myriad of identity affiliations, be they religious, geographic, familial, cultural or political. No one term can describe how the Turkmen or other Turks saw themselves in any one period. However, as the later history will reveal, in modern times it was their membership in the Turkic community which was most often discussed with respect to language and script; Turkic as opposed to Muslim, Turkestan, nomadic, non-Russian. Recognition of their ancient culture and reliance on or rejection of tradition became determinants of the direction Turks would take in the modern period. Activity concerning these issues undertaken during the Imperial period both by Turkic leaders

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*Saray, passim.*
as well as Russian officials laid groundwork for the Soviet issues of nationalism, language, cultural unity and choice of script. A brief look at some major linguistic and cultural undertakings will provide some insight to both the Turkic and Russian points of view on these issues which later shaped Soviet endeavors.

*Imperial Intervention and Tuzemstsy/Inorodtsy* 66

*Father, Mother, and Me, Sister and Auntie say,*  
*All the people like us are We, and everyone else is They.*  
*And They live over the sea, while We live over the way,*  
*But, would you believe it? They look upon We*  
*As only a sort of They!*  

*Rudyard Kipling, "We and They"*

While Turkmen script reform took place during the Soviet period, the foundations were laid during the Imperial period. The ties between language/script, identity and politics were already clear in the mid-nineteenth century. Turkic educational systems became arenas for social engineering and symbolized the path a community would follow. Traditional medreses, or confessional schools, represented the Turkic communities ties to the Muslim world and held the original Arabic script sacred. Jadidist medreses broke with the traditional method of teaching and promoted a reformed Arabic alphabet in a desire to promote literacy and empower the Turks through knowledge.

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66"For legal purposes, the population of Central Asia was classified as inorodtsy, but the term was never used in Central Asia itself, where the term tuzemtsy, directly translatable as 'native'...held currency." Adeeb Khalid, *The Politics of Muslim Cultural Reform* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998, P. 74).
The Imperial leadership also had ideas about the Turkic alphabet. They attempted to forge loyal Russian citizens out of Muslims by converting them to Orthodoxy using texts in the local dialects, but written with the Cyrillic script. Under the Russian Imperial system the Turkmen were *inorodtsy*, a term used to designate non-Russians in the empire." Imperial efforts to Russify the *inorodtsy* via language were conducted largely by missionaries. One prominent example is Nikolai Il'minskii (1822-1891), who in the late 1860s, as a missionary teacher in Kazan schools, began to promote teaching in local, non-Russian languages on the premise

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The Ukrainians and Belorussians were officially considered Russian and so did not fall under this category. See, Isabelle Kreindler, "Educational Policies toward the Eastern Nationalities in Tsarist Russia: A Study of Il'minskii's System," (Ph.D.dissertation, Columbia University, 1969), p. 84.


that it facilitated mastering Orthodoxy and hence led to adoption of the Russian national ideals. It sparked debate which continued into the Bolshevik era. "The question...was rarely whether local languages should displace Russian completely in schools but what balance between Russian and the native language in question was appropriate." Early education of non-Russians was to be taught with Orthodox religious texts in the native language transcribed in Cyrillic. This would not only symbolically separate students from their Islamic heritage, but would also pave the way for their future instruction in Russian. Although debate within the Russian administration continued concerning the application of the Il'minskii system, schools based on his methods were established for some Central Asian Turks.

The 'Russian-native schools' established in Turkmenistan by the Imperial government were likely based on the Il'minskii schools. Adrienne Edgar writes that "the goal of these schools was to 'educate the natives in the spirit of respect for the throne and state, Russian law and power...' and to prepare future Russian-speaking translators, clerks, military officers, and teachers." She further comments that while

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70 Many in this period, including Il'minskii, equated religion and nationality. The adoption of Orthodoxy was the process of Russification.

71 See Kreindler, 1969.


73 Dowler, 1995, p. 524.

the number of participating students was low, 228 in 1908, the influence on this group is significant in that they produced a Russian speaking, culturally russified group who "later became key political figures in the Soviet Turkmen republic."\(^75\)

According to Isabelle Kreindler, on the question of Soviet language policy in particular, the Tsarist era provides not only a background for, but was a source of inspiration for Lenin in the form of Il'minskii and his system of education for non-Russians. She writes that Il'minskii's conviction that enlightenment of non-Russians could only be achieved through the mother tongue is the sole missionary activity Lenin observed, having seen it employed in the Volga region in his youth. Due to this exposure in his formative years, Lenin essentially used the Il'minskii system of education in native languages to spread socialism in a similar proselytizing method.\(^76\)

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\(^75\) Edgar, 1999, p. 8.


Another influence on the Turkmen, especially on some formally schooled men who eventually became the early Soviet intellectuals working on cultural issues, came from the Tatars and their "modernized" school system. *Usul-i jedid* (new way or method), known in the historiography as Jadidism, was one of the earliest internally organized efforts at modernization among Central Asian Turks. The movement is most strongly linked to the Crimean Tatar Ismail Bey Gasparali (1851-1914) due to his tireless efforts to promote literacy among the Turks. He is best known for his publication of Imperial Russia's longest-running Turkic language newspaper *Perevodchik/Tercüman* (1883-1915), which was simultaneously printed in Russian primarily to appease censors.

**Jadidists**, as opposed to **kadimists** (Islamic traditionalists), supported a new, modern education system, one which broke with the traditional Islamic methods of individual instruction by rote memorization of religious texts and introduced students to other languages, literatures and sciences in addition to their religious training.

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77 There were also Jadidists in the urban centers of what is today Uzbekistan. They will not be discussed here because they do not appear to have influenced the Turkmen alphabet reformers to the degree that Tatar and Baškurt jadidists did. A good study of the Central Asian Jadidism is Khalid, 1998.


Turkmen who did not attend the Russian-native schools attended either Bukhara (Uzbek), Kazan (Tatar) or Ufa (Baškurt) medreses. Those educated in Kazan and Ufa were exposed to these new, modernist methods and the effects can be seen in these individuals’ approaches to Turkmen national identity building, specifically, script reform (see below).^80

Gasparah’s efforts included promoting a unified literary Turkic language and reformed Arabic script. He had created his newspaper Tercüman and ensured its distribution to all the Turkic regions as a tool for saving the Muslim Turks of the Russian empire from cultural degeneration via "a national unity based on a combined ethno-linguistic and Islamic platform, and a transformation and [restructuring] of society along modern lines."^81 Although he strongly advocated teaching in the local language, for example, Crimean Tatar or Kazakh, Gasparah himself used Ottoman Turkish vernacular in his publications, "addressing as broad an audience as possible, and primarily the common man."^82

In 1908, he explained what he had been striving for.

Although among the fifty million-strong Turkish nation there are differences in dialects (narechie) and pronunciation, from one region to another, [yet] in fact their language is one and the same. Therefore, this whole nation has the right to have a common literary language, and

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^80Muhammet Geldiew, one of Turkmenistan’s most important script reformers in the 1920s, was briefly a student in Bukhara, but was educated primarily in Ufa.


if it desires to exist in the world, it must, more than anything and before everything, work on the unity of language.\textsuperscript{83}

That Jadidist and Russian methods sometimes coincided was not simple irony, it had been Gaspirali's intention from the beginning. Gaspirali believed that it was better to come to terms with the fact of Russian colonialism and work from within it; using its institutions to develop educated nationalists who would be the future of Turkic nationalisms.

Without furnishing themselves with the essential tools of the modern societies of the day, the Muslim peoples of the Russian Empire vis-a-vis Russian rule were doomed. After all, many of these essentials could come through or even from the Russians, and the opposition of the Russians might seriously jeopardize such a development from the start.\textsuperscript{84}

Gaspirali never rejected Russian cultural influence or Russian language instruction, on the contrary, he hoped that the Turks would find ways to use it to their advantage. A few years later, during the period of Arabic script reform, Turkmen (and other) intellectuals did this by working within Soviet administrative structures, staying within the parameters of Moscow’s goals of socialism building and participating actively in Moscow organized conferences.

The Turks of Central Asia had been using the Arabic script since the advent of Islam in their region,\textsuperscript{85} but by the mid-nineteenth century debate over its perceived inadequacy for use with Turkic dialects was intensifying among all Turks of Central

\textsuperscript{83}Kirmli, 1996, p. 35.

\textsuperscript{84}Kirmli, 1996, pp. 36, 37-45.

Asia (and some in the Ottoman Empire). Several intellectuals, without consulting one another, proposed Turkified forms of the Arabic script. They did not wish to abandon the script, but they did wish to have it more accurately reflect Turkic sounds. But while constructing a new version of the alphabet they were also, very consciously, constructing a national consciousness and a response to Russian policies. These efforts carried over into the Soviet period and intensified when Turkification splintered into aspirations for national language development.
CHAPTER 2

Soviet Nationalities Policy and The Turkmen Reformed Arabic Script

"The national cultures must be given the opportunity to develop and unfold, to show their own efficiency, in order so to provide the conditions for their fusion into a common culture with a common language."

Stalin, Report to the Sixteenth Congress of the CPSU (July 1930)\textsuperscript{86}

\textit{Soviet Linguistic and Nationalities Policy}

The most prominent point of linguistic contention among Turkmen became how they would reform the Arabic script to best reflect the peculiarities of the Turkmen dialect. Their political and cultural considerations included whether to make their Turkmen alphabet reflect their Turkmen-ness more than their Turkic-ness.

While Turkic intellectuals had initiated the original discussions over language reform (1860s,1890s), like most cultural issues it eventually fell under the supervision of the central government in Moscow. One individual who played a principal role in the orthographic reforms in early Turkmenistan, and hence, in the formation of modern Turkmen identity, was Muhammet Geldiew (1889-1931), who will be discussed below. The account of his and his committees' works mirrors the

development of Soviet language policy, *korenizatsiya* (indiginization)\(^7\) and *natsionalizatsiya* (nationalization),\(^8\) Turkmen scripts, a literary language and a modern national, and eventually Soviet, identity.

In the 1920s the endeavors of the Turkmen alphabet reformers seem to have fallen well within the parameters of Soviet language policy of the time. Why then did neither the reforms nor the reformers themselves survive the 1930s? Later chapters will attempt to illustrate how changes in central policy led to the downfall of the 1920s intellectuals. Here an overview of early Soviet language policy will illustrate how central and peripheral ideas about the social role of script and language were initially in ostensible harmony.

The first quarter of the twentieth century was a period of great cultural enterprise in Turkic areas of the Soviet Union and Lenin encouraged local activity among the non-Russian peoples with policies such as *korenizatsiya*, or *natsionalizatsiya* as it was called in the early years. During the 1920s, this program emphasized equality of all national cultures and endorsed national languages, and it promoted the replacement of Europeans of the Russian imperial government in provincial elite

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\(^7\) *Korenizatsiya* comes from the word "root" and could literally be translated as "enrooting" which better connotes Bolshevik aspirations to entice and involve local cadres in building socialism; we may consider this as laying the roots of socialism.

\(^8\) Nationalization referred to the building up of the titular nationalities, and took more specific forms like Turkmenization and Uzbekification (*Uzbekizatsiya*). But this ignored smaller ethnic groups, like the ethnically Persian Baluchi in southern Turkmenistan, so indiginization was used to include all *korenye* people. See Terry Martin, "An Affirmative Action Empire: Ethnicity and the Soviet State, 1923-1938," (Ph. D. dissertation, The University of Chicago, 1996), pp. 34-35.
positions by indigenous leaders. Terry Martin refers to this policy as an element of the "Affirmative Action Empire."

The Soviets\textsuperscript{89} hoped that this leadership and management of the national republics by their own local cadres would allay potential national bitterness toward the new government being centralized in Moscow and distance it from its imperial predecessor.\textsuperscript{90} Though it sounds contradictory, essentially, "the Soviet leadership hoped, to disarm nationalism by promoting the forms of nationhood."\textsuperscript{91} The reasoning behind this is as follows,

By granting the forms of nationhood, the Soviet state could split the above-class national alliance for statehood. Class divisions, then, would naturally emerge, which would allow the Soviet government to recruit proletarian and peasant support for their socialist agenda.\textsuperscript{92}

Terry Martin further explains that, \textsuperscript{93}

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\textsuperscript{89}In using the term Soviet, I speak generally about Soviet leadership goals. The Soviet administrations actually consisted of diverse groups and embodied many varied opinions, especially on nationalities policy. For example, "skeptics chose to interpret the new nationalities policy as 'a temporary if necessary evil'," but Lenin stated that "national republics would continue to exist 'for a long time'." Martin, 1996, p. 53.

Other recent histories which demonstrate that the Soviet and Central Asian entities were not monolithic include Glennys Young, \textit{Power and the Sacred in Revolutionary Russia} (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997); Khalid, 1998.


\textsuperscript{91}Terry Martin, 1996, p. 1.

\textsuperscript{92}Martin, 1996, p. 21.
This conclusion was buttressed by a second premise: national consciousness was an unavoidable historic phase that all peoples must pass through on the way to internationalism.\(^9\)

Essentially, nationhood was a developmental step along the path to modernization.

Martin sees the core components of nationalities policies (creation of national territories, languages, elite, cultures, and so on) as temporary concessions which were part of larger concessions made during the New Economic Policy (NEP). While these core components continued, others such as limited degrees of regional autonomy or toleration of traditional cultural practices were terminated along with NEP in 1928.\(^4\)

In addition, natsionalizatsiiia was an integral aspect of the Soviets' attempt to promote socialist activity throughout the Union. They regarded educating the masses as training them to fulfill their role in efforts to build socialism and that required educators who could operate in the local languages. Clearly local leadership could do this best and this was the primary reason for Bolshevik interest in minority language issues. The faster languages were standardized, books were printed and people became literate, the faster they could acquire the knowledge necessary for building socialism.

Illiteracy became an enemy of the state. A military-like campaign to eradicate illiteracy from the Soviet Union was organized by the All-Union Extraordinary Commission for the Liquidation of Illiteracy. Work was carried out by the Anti-

\(^9\)Martin, 1996, p. 22.

Illiteracy Society, which was responsible for the production of practical teaching materials: textbooks, teacher training and activities to arouse public interest. As early as 1918, printing and education departments were created within Narkomnats (Commissariat of Nationalities)⁶⁶ to supply vernacular language materials to the non-Russian peoples of Russia. 'Likbez' (likvidatsia bezgramotnosti - liquidation of illiteracy) became an adjective to describe the schools established to educate adults,⁶⁶ as well as a cultural war cry. In 1923 the Twelfth Party Congress, with national languages and national elites in mind, delineated the Soviet nationalities policy.

The 1923 resolutions affirmed that the Soviet state would maximally support those forms of nationhood that did not conflict with the unitary central state. This meant a commitment to support the following national forms: national languages, national elites, national territories and national cultures.⁷⁷ This desire to see the many national cultures evolve into one social culture was the basis for the ultimate Bolshevik goal of 'purging national differences, especially language differences.'⁹⁶ But, until enough people were modernized, literate and educated in the basic tenets of socialism to assist in its construction, support would have to be shown to the national minorities, especially in the areas of education and language. This support was given via the intellectuals, employed in legislative and


leadership positions as mandated by korenizatsiia, who were allowed to work on cultural infrastructure: literature, alphabets, language standardization, educational reforms and most important, public debates in journals and newspapers about what national culture should be. Such possibilities allowed Turkmen intellectuals to build on the work of the Turkmen, Tatars and other Turks who had earlier published proposals for reform of the Arabic script. Although organized efforts began within established Soviet administrative units, alphabet reformers were Turkmen nationals whose concerns were the interests of the Turkmen people. They believed that Türkmençelesdirmek, or Turkmenifying the Arabic script so that it accurately reflected spoken Turkmen, would help to increase literacy as well as foster a sense of Turkmen nationalism; they likely believed that this nationalism could survive within socialism.

The Turkmen Reformed Arabic Alphabet

Turkmens! If we could live in friendship
We would dry up the Nile, we would come to Kulzum.
Teke, Yamut, Goklen, Yazyr and Ali Eli;
All five [tribes] we must become one family.
Magtumguly (1733-1783), Turkmen poet

Mid-nineteenth century ideas about Turkification of the Arabic script, promoted chiefly by Tatar Jadidists to support a Muslim oriented all-Turkic identity, evolved into more regionally specific proposals for a "Turkestani Turkic" among

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99Strict definition of Turkmen intellectuals as nationalists or communists remains a quandary. Until further evidence is made available to help define their individual attitudes and goals, they should be considered nationals who worked within the communist system.
Central Asia Jadidists in the early twentieth century. Attention to modern identity and cultural development continued to grow and become more regionally focused. Turkmen, Tatar, Kazak, Kirgiz, Uzbek, Azerbaijani, and Ottoman language and script reforms began to take shape as specific to those speech communities. This tendency was formalized when the 1924 demarcation of political borders also set "national" boundaries by which language and alphabet issues would be determined. As alphabet became a critical cultural claim by which national identities were symbolized and affirmed, Turkification became Turkmenification, Uzbekification and Tatarization.

Türkmençelesdirmek, or Turkmenification, of the Arabic alphabet began during the late Tsarist period, however most work to Turkmenify the Arabic alphabet was accomplished during the early Soviet period in Soviet committees. It was simultaneously an undertaking of Turkmen nationals interested in advancing a modern Turkmen identity, and a Soviet effort to enhance the building of socialism through natsionalizatsia; they overlapped in their interest to spread literacy, codify languages and enhance education. While reform took an administratively Soviet form, and was controlled and ultimately ended by changes in the Soviet policy, it was a Turkmen undertaking. Turkmen intellectuals viewed the symbolism of alphabet as powerful enough to reflect their own national identity: Turks forever, but now Turkmen nationals too.

Most scholars have claimed that the discussions of orthographic reform in Turkmenistan began much later than in the other Turkic areas. In fact, models of

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reformed alphabets, Turkmen grammar books and newspaper articles from the 1910s and even as early as 1900 demonstrate that discussion of language emerged in Turkmenistan almost contemporaneously with other Turkic regions. The height of debate concerning Turkmen alphabet reform was, as in the other Turkic areas, during the 1920s and 1930s.¹⁰¹

One of the earliest twentieth century records of a Turkmen writing about lack of vowels in the Arabic script was S. Agabekow in 1904.¹⁰² Throughout the following years several different versions of the Arabic alphabet were proposed in attempts to bring the written language closer to the spoken.¹⁰³ Each plan varied in the number of vowels and consonants but all involved creating an Arabic script which would encompass the peculiarities of spoken Turkmen. While such individuals may have embarked on linguistically oriented alphabet reform in pursuit of Türkmençeleşdirmek (Turkmenification), their work was soon incorporated into the Soviet political agenda. One individual who worked on language Turkmenification

¹⁰¹ Professor Myratgeldi Söýegow, On Çynar: Ilkinji Türkmen Dilçileri be Edebiyatçilary Hakynoda Öçerkler (Kuyaş: Aşgabat, 1993), p. 16-21, writes that the first specifically Turkmen reformed alphabet was created by Alişbeg Suleýmanowicz Aliew in 1913.


¹⁰³ Durdyew, p. 18; Söýegow, 1993, pp. 16-21.
within Moscow's parameters as they were set in the 1920s was Muhammet Geldiew.  

Of all the Turkmen personalities who have been involved in issues of national identity as it relates to language and script, and vice versa, Muhammet Geldiew is significant not only because he played such a great role in the intellectual issues of his time, but also because his work continues to influence current Turkmen scholarship. One prominent Turkmen author attributes to Geldiew such an essential role that "Turkmen language reform cannot be discussed without mentioning Geldiew's name," and calls him "the founder of Turkmen linguistics." Furthermore, the experiences of his short life (1889-1931) epitomized those of a Turkmen intellectual during the early Soviet period. Muhammet Geldiew devoted himself to the enrichment of Turkmen culture and the growth of literacy and education in the Republic of Turkmenistan (declared 27 October 1924). He worked within the Soviet system, in official settings and through official channels, and he seems to have led a responsible and respectable life, but in the end, like many prominent individuals of the

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104 For discussion of philology and the modernization of Turcology as a scientific field, see A. Samoilovich, "Sovremennoe sostoianie i blizhaishie zadachi izucheniiia turetskikh iazykov," [The current condition and most immediate problems of the study of Turkic languages], Pervyi Vsesoiuzniy tsentral'nyi komitet Tiirkologcheskii S'ezd: Stenografcheskii otchet [First All-Union Turcological Congress: Stenographic] 26 Fev - 5 Marta (Baku, 1926), pp. 131-139.


early Soviet period, he was labelled "pan-turkist" and "nationalist" and was
condemned to the "enemy of the state" pages of Soviet history.107

Muhammet Geldiew, the son of Çeleken fishermen, attended the local primary
school and then went on to a Bukharan medrese108 before graduating from the
Jadidist109 medrese Galiya in Ufa, Başıldistan.110 While he is referred to as a
linguist (dilçi) by both his contemporaries and by modern scholars, there is no
indication that he was ever trained in linguistics in the western sense. However,
Galiya was a Jadidist medrese and the curriculum there is notable.

The medrese studies included history, mathematics, geography, ecology,
chemistry and physics. The library was reportedly rich and the students had access to
newspapers in Russian, Tatar and Arabic; perhaps Geldiew’s interest in language
stemmed in part from this background. The student-body was diverse with students

107See M. D. Annagurdow, Türkmenistanyň metbugat taryhyndan oçerkler

The works of three current Turkmen scholars, Professor Myratgeldi Söyegow
(himself a modern Turkmen alphabet reformer), Hezretguly Durdyew, and Professor
Tagan Täçmyradow, have been seminal in restoring Geldiew’s reputation.

108Tagangeldi Täçmyradow and Myratgeldi Söyegow, "Mukhammed Gel’dyev,"
Sovetskaia Tiurkologiia No. 6, 1979, pp. 95-96.

109This medrese was one of many founded or reformed by jadids who rejected the
traditional education consisting of memorization of Arabic language works and
implemented more rational thought based curricula. Sometimes strongly anti-Russian,
sometimes simply pro-Western the Central Asian component of these young leaders of
Muslim nationalist movements emerged after the 1905 Revolution to form groups such as
the "Young Bukharans" and the Alash Orda Party. See Michael Rywkin, Moscow’s

110"Galiya medrese was founded by Ziya Kemaly under the social and politically
democratic conditions following the 1905-1907 revolution." Durdyew, p. 10.
having come from all of the Turkic regions. This demographic diversity doubtless lent itself to Geldiew's knowledge of other Turkic dialects at an early age. The medrese was progressive for its time, focusing on language instruction, including Russian and Tatar, as well as providing instruction in Russian and other and other literatures and theater. In addition to the curriculum, one difference between Galiya medrese and other more traditional medreses was the freedom to participate in extracurricular activities: playing instruments and giving concerts; attending the theater or evening lectures; and joining reading groups are some of the activities mentioned in texts concerning Galiya. Moreover, the students were allowed to dress in European style clothing and let their hair grow.111

The geographic location of Galiya medrese offered its students access to one of the most important Turkic movements of the nineteenth century, Jadidism, and to the ideas of the other movements of that time: Socialism, Turkism, Islamism, perhaps even Ottomanism. Study at the geographic center of the debates surely must have familiarized Geldiew with the issues of Turkic identity and modernization which likely would have affected his views as an alphabet reformer.

Ufa was a center for Tatar and Baškurt culture in this period, with ongoing activity in publishing, printing and debate over modernization and identity. As an important provincial city, Ufa received attention from the new Soviet leadership, and Lenin himself spoke there in 1919. The Basmachi resistance leader A. Zeki Velidi

111Durdyew, p. 11. Students at a more traditional medrese would have had shaved heads under their headgear and worn shirts with no collars under a flowing robe. See M. H. Hasaynow, Galimjan Ibragimow (Kazan, 1969), cited in Durdyew, p. 11-12.
Togan (1890-1970) was also in Ufa during those years pressing for autonomy for Başkurdistan.\textsuperscript{112} The Tatar leader of the Muslim Socialist Committee, Mirsaid Sultangaliev\textsuperscript{113} was also in Ufa during those years, dispatched by Lenin specifically to convince the Başkurt and Kazaks under Togan to 'affiliate' with the Bolsheviks.\textsuperscript{114} Also in 1919, in nearby Kazan, "specialists" met to discuss and recommend "Muslim alphabet reform."\textsuperscript{115} To what extent Geldiew, or other Turkmen, knew of these activities and with which his sympathies lay is unknown, but it is likely that the time spent in this Turkic region during his formative years contributed greatly to his intellectual development and his expectations for the Turkmen future.

From 1917 to 1921 Geldiew worked as a teacher in Tatar and Başkurt primary schools. He was later a teacher at a party primary school and a pedagogical school \textit{(pedtekhnikum)} in Aşgabat.\textsuperscript{116} There is little available information about Geldiew's life during these years but the fact that he worked in Party schools, as opposed to

\begin{itemize}
  \item Sultangaliev was later Assistant to Stalin at the Soviet Commissariat of Nationalities \textit{[Narkomnats]} and then the focus of a show trial. For detailed history of \textit{Narkomnats} and Sultangaliev's trial see, Blank, 1994.
  \item Paksoy, 1995, p. 379.
  \item Blank, 1994, p. 174.
  \item Söyegow, 1993, p. 49. 17 July 1919 Aşgabat was renamed Poltoratsk. It was changed back to Aşgabat by 1927. A. Karryev, \textit{Istoriiia Sovetskogo Turkmenistana}, (Ashkhabad: Ylym, 1970), p. 460. For consistency, I shall use only Aşgabat to refer to the capital city of Turkmenistan.
\end{itemize}
pursuing a position in a medrese or a mekteb, may be indicative of a belief in the party's proclamations for support for nationalities. In the early years of Bolshevik control many of the Turkic leaders did believe in the Bolshevik proclamations of self-determination and cultural autonomy. They soon became disillusioned and many perished in their struggle for cultural autonomy. ¹¹⁷ For example, Seymour Becker writes

The desertion of Osman Hodja [sic] and other prominent Young Bukharans to the Basmachis in November 1921 left the government of the Bukharan Peoples Soviet Republic in the hands of those who, like Faizullah Khodzhaev, chose to depend on Russian support in order to retain power rather than join the anti-Soviet camp. For most of them the choice was the lesser of two evils, and they still hoped to be able to pursue an independent, liberal-nationalist policy... ¹¹⁸

Yet the 1938 purge of Khodzhaev was one of the most well known in Central Asia; the former member of the Central Executive Committee of the USSR, and Ikramov, First Secretary of the Uzbek Communist Party were executed as Trotskyites on March 13 along with N.I. Bukharin and A.I. Rykov.¹¹⁹

The administrative and political entities in which these intellectuals and national leaders worked were some of the more obvious forms of Moscow's influence on

¹¹⁷Togan, Sultangaliev, and Khodzhaev are some of the more widely recognized names. Again, until more detailed information is made available (for example, personal papers, committee transcripts, Geldiwe’s speech at the 1926 Baku congress) we can not know with certainty where Geldiwe or other Turkmen intellectuals fell on such issues.

¹¹⁸Becker, 1964, p. 305. Bukharan Peoples' Soviet Republic was the political entity organized around the city of Bukhara, based on the Bukharan Emirate which had been a Tsarist protectorate.

Central Asian development. In addition to economic and political programs, such as local soviets, the New Economic Policy, collectivization, and industrialization, there were cultural approaches to building socialism ranging from new schools, literacy courses for adults, and language and alphabet standardization. One or multiple commissions, conferences and/or commissariats oversaw these areas of development. In Turkmenistan, the Academic Commission navigated alphabet reform.

The Turkmen Academic Commission [Türkmen Bilim Heyatı]

On 29 December 1919 Lenin issued a directive to national leaders to begin work on the eradication of illiteracy as the first step in bringing revolutionary culture to the masses in the shortest time possible.\footnote{G.P. Serdyuchenko, pp. 23-24; Täçmyradow, 1984, p.155.} In order to facilitate this attack on illiteracy, to write books in Turkmen, supply materials to newly opened schools, and publish periodicals and newspapers, the Turkmen, whose intellectual elite was extremely small in number, invited educated Uzbek, Azerbaijani and Tatar cadres to assist in creating an educated socialist populace.\footnote{Täçmyradow, 1984, p.155.} Results were seen as early as 1920 with the publication of Alişbeg Aliew's *The Newest Turkmen Alphabet and
Primary Schools,"122 and Türkmenistan, the first Turkmen language newspaper;123 the second, Türkmen İlî, came out in 1922.124

Yet, the alphabet required further refinement as well as standardized orthographic rules. At this time the Turkmen were using a thirty-three letter Arabic alphabet. Diacritics augmented the three traditional vowels ا، و، ي to reflect nine phonemes: [a], [ö], [o], [e], [u], [ũ], [y], [i], and long [i]. However, representation of all the long vowels, critical to reflecting the phonetic distinctions of spoken Turkmen, remained unresolved.125 The Türkmen Bilim Heyaty was created to address such linguistic problems.

The Turkmen Academic Commission, based in Ağabat, was founded at the end of 1921 to handle the standardization of the Turkmen literary language.126 The Commission's task was to create a reformed Arabic alphabet which would reflect the peculiarities of spoken Turkmen, and to codify orthography and grammar in order to aid in the spread of literacy.127

123 Karryev, 1970, p. 461. The first issue came out on 29 July. The paper's name was later changed to Soviet Türkmenistany.
125 Tәçmyradow, 1984, p. 156.
126 Its name was later changed from the Turkic term Heyaty (Council) to the international/Russian term Kommissiiasy (Commission). To avoid confusion, I will refer to it at the Commission throughout.
127 Tәçmyradow, 1984, p. 156.
Muhammet Geldiew, who had been selected for membership in early 1922, presumably by the Commission’s creator, the State Scholars Council [Dövlet Alymlar Geňesi], remained as the only original member\(^{128}\) when the Commission was reorganized on 17 April 1922\(^{129}\) in Taşkent, the capital of the newly established Turkestan A.S.S.R.\(^{130}\) The Commission aimed to reform the Arabic alphabet in accordance with the peculiarities of spoken Turkmen in order to aid in the spread of literacy and to create standardized rules for written Turkmen.

Long vowels were the most often mentioned peculiarities of Turkmen. In Turkish, which retained few long vowels "yourself" is pronounced as spelled özün, but in Turkmen özין retains the long [ö] in pronunciation and in the 1929-30 Latin

1921 - Chair: S. Öwezaew, Members: M. Geldiew, H. Sähetmyradow  
1922 - Chair: K. Böriew, Members: M. Geldiew, Allaguly Garahanow  
1923 - Chair: k. Böriew, Members: M. Geldiew, ö. Atabaew

\(^{129}\)The Council was itself under the supervision of the Turkestan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic's Commissariat of People's Education (Magaryf Halk Komissaryldygy).

At this time the Turkmen region was still part of the Turkestan S.S.R. which was formed on 11 April 1921, with its governmental center in Taşkent. The commission was reorganized in part because its chairman (Öwezaew) had been spending too much time in Baku and needed to be replaced and also because the Soviet administration for Central Asia was being centralized in Taşkent. For reference, see Alexander Park, Bolshevism in Turkestan, 1917-1927 (NY: Columbia University Press, 1957.)

\(^{130}\)Täcmyradow, 1984, p. 157. This move would have been during the Second Congress of Culture and Education Workers held in Taşkent March-April 1922, although it is unclear whether Geldiew or any Turkmen participated; examination of the congress's stenographic record may clarify, William Fierman, 1991, p. 61.
alphabet these long vowel phonemes were signified by doubling the vowel symbols, aa, oo, öö, uu, yy, ii, ūū.\textsuperscript{131}

Long vowel phonemes truly are linguistic peculiarities of Turkmen. Only Turkmen and Yakut preserve primary long vowels (or diphthongs) from the Ancient Turkic. Linguist Nicholas Poppe explains,

The primary long vowels were long vowels even in the oldest stage of the languages...In most of the Turkic languages the primary long vowels became short and converged with the short vowels...It is to be noted that of languages still preserving the primary long vowels Turkmenian [sic] does not have secondary long vowels, but Yakut does have both.\textsuperscript{132}

According to Poppe, a primary long vowel is one preserved from the Ancient Turkic language, sometimes called Gök Türk after the empire which used it. A secondary long vowel appeared only in modern Turkic dialects as regional accents developed. For example, in Turkmen ogul (son) reflects a hard [g] as did Ancient Turkic, but in Turkish the [g] is softened, the speaker glides over the [g] and the [o] and [u] begin to blend. In Tuvan, Sagai and Shor [ol], in Altai and Kirghiz [ul], for example, the [g] is not even represented in writing as the pronunciation reflects no trace of this

\textsuperscript{131}B. Charyiarov, "Iz Istorii Tyrkmenskogo Alfavita," Voprosy Sovershenstvovanii Alfavitov Turtskikh Iazykov SSSR, N.A. Baskakov ed. (Moscow: Nauka, 1972), pp.149-156.

See my appendix for title page of a primer which displays many examples of long vowels being depicted with two symbols in A.P. Potseluyevskii, Türkmen Dilini Evrenmöge Ullanma (Aşqabat: Tyrkmenistaan Devlet Neşrijiaat', 1929), especially p. 121. My thanks to Adrienne Edgar for providing me with this text.

\textsuperscript{132}Nicholas Poppe, 1965, p. 177-180. My thanks to the participants of the 11th Annual Nicholas Poppe Symposium, University of Washington, May 1999 and Professor Ilse Cirtautas for helpful discussion of the topic of long vowels.

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ancient feature. This elision over the once represented [g] creates a long vowel sound and so Poppe catergorized the feature as a secondary long vowel.

It is difficult to determine how much of this the Turkmen orthographic reformers comprehended. They may very well have discerned that this is in fact an aspect of Turkmen which the other Muslim Turkic dialects did not share. Whether Turkmen or Russian linguists, who also did work on various Turkmen language reforms, knew about the retention of long vowels in Yakut is unknown. The handling of this linguistic characteristic in Latin and Cyrillic-based Turkic alphabets is curious. Yakut does not reflect long vowels with double graphemes in any alphabet, yet Gagauz and Tuvan alphabets do in both Latin and Cyrillic-based alphabets. Khakas, Chuvash and Altai Turkic use double graphemes in the Cyrillic-based alphabets while Turkmen does not.\textsuperscript{133}

This inconsistent method of representing long vowel phonemes could have been part of what western Soviet scholars see as Moscow's attempts to divide the Turkic peoples; \textit{divide et impera}. No doubt further archival research and access to conference records will shed light on this. What is certain at this time is that Turkmen language reformers seized upon long vowels as a critical cultural claim which they labored to reflect in their Arabic-based alphabet in order to symbolize their Turkmen identity through script. Turkmen exhortations to reflect this peculiarity of the Turkmen language should be viewed as attempts to create an orthography which accurately reflected the spoken code and which nationalized the writing system.

\textsuperscript{133}Baskakov, ed., 1972, pp. 47, 64, 147, 187, 199, 213.
1923 Reformed Arabic Script

The Turkmen Academic Commission's first step was to codify the Turkmen Arabic alphabet and orthography. For this they called on the experience of other Turkic groups.¹³⁴ Representatives from different Turkic areas assisted the Turkmen, but the influence of Tatar and Baškurt linguists seems to have been most prevalent, especially those who knew Geldiew from the Galiya medrese.¹³⁵

Geldiew was assigned the task of drafting a reformed Arabic-based Turkmen alphabet and standardized grammar. One of Geldiew's steadfast convictions was that Turkmen should be viewed as a language with peculiarities which set it apart from other Turkic languages. Despite this opinion of distinction in Turkic dialects, he frequently worked with individuals from other Turkic groups and seems to have found it appropriate to use their work as a foundation for his. It appears that it was his decision to rely on an earlier Tatar adaptation of the Arabic script¹³⁶ as model for the version he presented to the Turkmen Academic Commission in 1923.¹³⁷ This alphabet was designed to distinguish vowel graphemes to a degree not found in earlier Turkmen Arabic-based scripts. Each phoneme was signified by a different symbol,


¹³⁵ Durdyew, p. 24; Täçmyradow, p. 156.

¹³⁶ Täçmyradow, 1989, pp. 8-9. Gibad (Gabat) Habibullowicz Alparow was the most influential.

¹³⁷ Durdyew, p. 24.

created by combination of letter and diacritics, unlike earlier alphabets which used individual graphemes to represent multiple phonemes. This reform also addressed the controversial vowels. Seven symbols signified thirteen vowel phonemes, with diacritics to indicate long-short, front-back. For example, different diacritics over the indicated short or long \( [u], [\ddot{u}] \).

The reform attempted to codify spelling and grammar as well as signs. First Geldiew created or borrowed linguistic terminology so that work could be conducted in a 'scientific manner'.\(^{139}\) Then, he set down rules for the orthography, including:

1. Rounded vowels would be written only in the first syllable, [even if pronounced in the second; e.g. \textit{they}, pronounced [olor], is spelled \textit{olar}].
2. Voiceless consonants would be written as voiced at the end of a word.
3. Compound words would be hyphenated, but proper names like \textit{Magtumguly} from \textit{Magtum} and \textit{guly} would be written as one.
4. Numerals would be separated, e.g., \textit{yigrimi bir} [twenty one].
5. Borrowed, or "foreign," words would follow Turkmen phonetics if possible; [following vowel harmony was considered the most important]. Some well-established Persian and Arabic words like \textit{serdar}, \textit{derya} were exempted.
6. Arabic consonant symbols representing phonemes not found in Turkic dialects were excised.\(^{140}\)

This reform was a comprehensive approach to orthographic codification, however it was not perfect. The vowel symbols had been increased and long \([u],[\ddot{u}],[i],[y]\) were distinguished, but \([o],[\ddot{o}]\) still were not.

\(^{139}\)Subject (\textit{eyle}), consonant (\textit{cekim ses}), vowel (\textit{cekimli ses}), question mark (\textit{sorag belgist}), grammar (\textit{durs yazuw}), term (\textit{adalga}), sentence (\textit{soklem}). Many of these terms are still in use today.

The Commission accepted Geldiew’s script although they altered it slightly apparently in an effort to *limit* the differences between it and the reformed Arabic alphabets of the other Turkic groups. "In creating the rules for writing (grammar), [it was decided] to operate at the level of the Turkic people and not to deviate from the historical course."\(^{141}\) This reflects their desire to coordinate Turkmen grammar, language and script with other Turkic groups due to continuing concern over maintaining the Turkic cultural continuum. While Geldiew was the orthographer, the larger entity was making the final decisions about script and its relationship to national identity, that is, Turkic-ness/Turkmen-ness.

The new alphabet was announced in *Turkmen Ili*, a newspaper which the Commission had been assigned to create in order to advance its goals; at that time it was being published in Taşkent.\(^ {142}\) During these years of language and script reform, each region had, in addition to the committees, social clubs, and free literacy courses, its own publication created specifically to exhibit new reforms and disseminate information about them. Even the Turkic regions in Georgia and Armenia had newspapers to advocate reform to the Latin alphabet during the early 1920s. These were sanctioned and paid for by the central government in Moscow as part of their continuing effort to raise literacy and build socialism, in addition to the

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\(^{141}\)"Dürs yazuv kadalary düzülende, türki halklar bilen deňezerräk gitmek hem-de taryhy yollardan gaty daňlashmazlyk şörelgesinden ugur alnypdyr," Durdyew, p. 53.

opportunity, as they saw it, to distance the Turks from their Muslim heritage via script.\(^{143}\)

This was not the first reformed Turkmen script to be published, although it was the first attempt to standardize. The earlier scripts apparently either did not address comprehensively or did not lend themselves to solving the problem of inconsistencies in written Turkmen. This reform addressed grammar, spelling, expression of vowel sounds and even the representation of foreign words. Before the introduction of the Commission's 10-point grammar reform (based on Geldiew's work) there had been no one clear system for writing in Turkmen with a reformed Arabic alphabet. Even the newspaper Türkmenistan, which reported many of the events concerning orthographic reform and in which these various intellectuals published, did not display consistent orthography.\(^{144}\)

Almost as soon as the Commission's reformed alphabet and grammar rules were announced, other linguists began to propose competing variants. It is not clear from available records exactly how much contact there was between the authors of the various orthographic systems. However we do know that they used the same publications to air their views and to respond to those of other scholars, and they attended many conferences together. So it is likely that most of them did know each other personally. For example, in October 1923, Geldiew attended the Central Asian

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\(^{144}\)Täçmyradow, 1984, p. 156; Durdyew, pp. 54-55.
Uzbek Language and Orthography Congress in Bukhara where he met Yakup Nasyryly, who had published the first opposition to the reformed Arabic script based on Geldiew's work.  

This is a noteworthy reminder that the individuals who worked on Turkmen language issues comprised a small, intimate group who strongly influenced each other’s philosophies and often life direction.

In the early days of Soviet socialist construction and purges (1920s, 1930s), the work one did and the company one kept could have a lasting effect. Being labelled an enemy of the state or national chauvinist could stem simply from being associated with individuals who had called attention to themselves, or from membership in intellectual groups. For example, the Uzbek literary circle Chagatay Gurungi was accused of trying to affect a new age in art and literature and awaken an anti-Soviet spirit by instigating a new national movement. In the early 1920s, the Gurung and especially its well-known organizer Fitrát rejected the idea of a "Turkic" language and advocated a return to Chagatay as the basis for an Uzbek literary language. Their activism came to haunt them in the 1930s when "they were accused of attempting to drag the Uzbek language backward five hundred years to the era of Chagatay and block the penetration of worldwide international words into the Uzbek language." Fitrát and several other important language planners died under 'unknown

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145Nasyryly was in Bukhara, his article appeared in Türkmenistan 12 August, 1923. Täçmyradow, 1984, p. 160; Durdyew, p. 28-29.


circumstances' between 1937 and 1940. In Turkmenistan similar circumstances occurred in the 1930s when fellow language reformer Allaguly Garahanow posthumously attacked Geldiew, along with other deceased members of the Turkmen Cultural Institute, accusing them of having spent the 1920s attempting to spread Chagatayism among the Turkmen and comparing them to Fiträt. Professor Täçmyradow writes that it is because of Garahanow's published accusations of nationalism and pan-Turkism that Geldiew's works ended up in a closed archival collection (fond). As will be discussed later, the consequences suffered by Geldiew and his colleagues were severe and the effects on their professional and personal reputations were long-lasting.

Professional interaction between Geldiew and his old school mate, the Tatar linguist Gibad Habibullowîç Alparow (1888-1936), was extensive and fruitful. Yet this close association was another focus of negative press in posthumous attacks on Geldiew. Alparow had assisted the Turkmen Academic Commission from 1922-1924 and continued thereafter to play a significant role in Turkmen orthographic reform and language planning. In addition to his official assistance with the Commission, he and Geldiew collaborated on more than 10 language textbooks.

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149 Täçmyradow, 1989, p. 31, 39.

150 Täçmyradow, 1984, p. 32.


152 Durdyew, see bibliography.
He strongly encouraged the Turkmen to follow the example of the Tatar reformed Arabic alphabet, which Geldiew favored. Geldiew and Alparow began using this Tatar-influenced reformed alphabet in the textbooks they wrote, and in the ones Geldiew translated from Russian and Turkish into Turkmen. 153 The two continued to use their alphabet until 1926. 154


154 Durdyew, p. 28. Durdyew implies that the newspaper Türkmenistan also began using this script at this time, but it is unclear.
Feud with Garahanow

After the delimitation of the Central Asian republics in 1924, Geldiew returned to Asgabat, now the capital of the Turkmen Soviet Socialist Republic, to work on the Turkmen State Academic Council (GUS - Gosudarstvennoi Uchenoi Sovet), which had been founded by the People’s Commissariat of Education. Literacy and education remained prominent foci while Moscow was organizing entities to facilitate the construction of socialism. It was at this time that the dispute began between Geldiew and Allaguly Garahanow over whether the Turkmen reformed Arabic script should be brought closer to or made more distinct from other Turkic scripts. Garahanow had been a member of the Turkmen Academic Commission after it had moved to Tashkent and at that time had supported Geldiew’s work, but he left after about six months.\(^{155}\)

In his book *The Turkmen Language in These Times*, Garahanow came out strongly against the alphabet reforms based on Geldiew’s work.\(^{156}\)

The original alphabet issue had been the lack of symbols to represent individual Turkic vowel sounds and the peculiarities of the Turkmen dialect. Now, choices in alphabet construction, most specifically with respect to vowel representation, were directly tied to the issues of national identity and whether, via their script, the Turkmen would signify their Turkmen-ness or Turkic-ness. As a result of continuing contention and disagreement among the language reformers, two small conferences

\(^{155}\)Durdyew, p. 23.

\(^{156}\)Häzirki Zaman Türkmen Dili, pp. 53-54, cited in Täçmyradow, 1984, p. 161. Professor Täçmyradow adds that this dispute was not played out in the press.
were held. Geldiew and Garahanow put forth their views at these meetings.

Essentially, Geldiew, who was still working closely with Aiparow and other Tatar linguists, wanted each vowel sound -- [a], [o], [ö], [e], [ä], [u], [ü], [y], [i] -- to be represented by a separate character. Garahanow, who was working closely with some Uzbek language reformers, wanted to have only 4 characters: one to represent [a], one to represent [o],[ö],[u],[ü], one to represent [y],[i] and one to represent [e],[ä]. After these meetings, Geldiew's script continued to be used in textbooks, but Garahanow's was used in newspapers and journals.157 Reliable sources do not permit reconstruction of the content of the debates or the reasons for Garahanow's departure from the Commission several years earlier. However, Durdyew's speculation that the friction between these two linguists may not have been language related implies that it was a difference in opinion over the new republic's cultural orientation and its relationship to other Turkic regions. That is, Garahanow desired less difference between Turkmen and Uzbek scripts, and presumably that extended to other cultural arenas, while Geldiew seems to have wanted to distinguish the Turkmen script from Uzbek specifically while bringing it as close as possible to Tatar.158


158 Although there is no specific information available in published material, Geldiew's reason for wanting to be distinct from Uzbek may have lain in the history between the Turkmen and Uzbeks where the Uzbeks were often in a superior position. For background on Turkmen-Uzbek relations see Adrienne Edgar, "Nationality Policy and National Identity: The Turkmen Soviet Socialist Republic, 1924-1929," paper delivered at Workshop on Central Asian Studies, University of Wisconsin, October 9-12, 1997.
Lexicography and Development of the Literary Language

In addition to alphabet, the Turkmen Academic Commission focused on the development of a literary language which would embrace the new concepts Turkmen would encounter as Soviet citizens in the modern, socialist age. The goals of the Soviet literacy campaigns were to engender literacy as quickly as possible, or, in Soviet terms, to liquidate illiteracy (likbez). Use of vocabulary and structures accessible and familiar to the largest number of people was the most efficient way to accomplish that goal. Hence, the Commission's first objective, in developing "scientific terminology" and neologisms to modernize and socialize the Turkmen vocabulary, became choosing words and phrases which would be understood by all Turkmen regardless of their dialect.\textsuperscript{159}

When Geldiew developed the linguistic terminology he attempted to keep the terminology as accessible as possible to the general public, and to stay close to the terminology of other Turkic groups,\textsuperscript{160} even if it meant choosing a term of Arabic or Persian etymology. Garahanow seized upon this reliance on pre-modern culture not only in his attacks on Geldiew, but on the members of the Turkmen Cultural Institute whose duty it was to assist in building a literary language.\textsuperscript{161}

\textsuperscript{159}Täçmyradow, 1984, p.16.

\textsuperscript{160}51 terms were created 36 of which are still used today. G. Alparow and M. Geldiew, Dil Sapaktygy [Language Lesson] (Taşkent, 1924), cited in Täçmyradow, 1984, p. 17.

Several paths of language development were available to Geldiew and the other scholars on the Commission: Base the literary language (1) on the innate richness of the Turkmen vernacular, (2) on a classical Turkic literary language like Chagatay, the poetry of Navoi or of Magtumguly, (3) on words of Arabic and Persian origin, or (4) on Soviet-international and Russian vocabulary. A scholar's choice to champion one of these paths influenced not only Turkmen language development but also, as will be seen, ultimately, their own careers and lives.\footnote{Professor Täçmyradow writes that "In standardizing the literary language, the need to base it on one dialect or patois was theoretically correct, but under the conditions in Turkmenistan in the 1920s-1930s, to apply this [method] was both difficult and dangerous." Edebi dili normalaşdyrmakda haşsy bolsa-da bir dialekt ya-da geleşişe esaslanmak zerulygy teoretiki taydan dogry bolsa-da, 1920-1930-hji ýyllarda Türkmenistanyň şertlerinde muny durmuşa geçirmek kyn hem howpludy. Täçmyradow, 1984, p. 23.}

Potentially perilous forks lay in the first three paths. Yet Geldiew, and other intellectuals, strongly supported reliance on existing Turkmen vocabulary. Borrowing some from each of the main dialects or from traditional Turkmen poetry was a popular option among intellectuals very much in line with the basic tenets of national cultural development (korenizatsiia). But if a concept could not be found, another source would need to be tapped. As Geldiew saw it, the options were:

In the case of a term not being in our own language, first we'll go to our brethren, like the Kazak, Uzbek, Tatar or Azerbaijani....from these languages we should take pure Turkic words which haven't been forgotten.

Second, if it can not be found in these, it should be taken from Chagatay, Uighur or old Turkic.

Third, there is the option of borrowing words from Arabic, Persian or European languages. We are completely in accord with this third option and Comrade Nasyrly's view, that is, in the problem of
borrowing terms, we support taking them from European languages, which have been the [dominant] cultural subject of the last century.\textsuperscript{163}

Geldiew’s candid approach to keeping their national language Turkic in content, which was within the parameters of the Soviet policy of the time, would later be used to denounce him.

In the midst of Arabic script reform and lexical development, Moscow-approved discussions about adopting a Latin-based alphabet, similar to those discussions taking place all over Central Asia, began to appear in Turkmen publications.\textsuperscript{164} Still the Commission pressed on with the Arabic script, an indication that the Turkmen intellectuals were committed to retaining the Arabic script. This point is not a very complicated one for the Turkmen intellectuals in question at this time. They were Turks, and Turks had been using the Arabic script for a thousand years. Their literature was written in it, they had been educated in it and they viewed it as a basic element of their Turkic culture. Their decision to reform and Turkify it did not mean they were rejecting any part of their heritage. Even taking it a step further with Turkmenification was not rejecting the past but staking a claim on the future -- future which would still be Muslim, but modern and now, nationally oriented.

\textsuperscript{163} M. Geldiew, "Türkmenistan gazetiniň dili ýa-ki bizde adalga meselesi," \textit{Türkmenistan}, 1925, April, cited in Täçmyradow, 1984, p. 30; 1989, p. 29. The newspaper’s issue date is unclear in the 1984 publication it is listed at April 15, in the 1989 on April 14.

\textsuperscript{164} Durdyew, pp. 31-33.

\textsuperscript{165} Durdyew, pp. 32-33.
Despite the open challenge to their efforts by newspaper articles agitating for adoption of the Latin alphabet as had taken place in Azerbaijan in 1924, in 1925 the Commission announced another reform for the Arabic script, this time to accommodate sounds found in Russian words which were becoming more and more prevalent in Turkmen. Alphabet, like other aspects of culture, was slowly becoming a medium for expressing Turkmen Sovietness; national in form, socialist in content. Literature began to reflect Soviet culture and ideals with poetry such as "Red Army," "Statues of Lenin," songs like "My Tractorist," biographies of popular personalities like an akyn who talks about singing to the great hero (batyr) Lenin. As the carrier of Soviet socialism, Russian vocabulary entered the Turkmen lexicon for full expression of Soviet culture. Turkmen language reformers had to accommodate this vocabulary when standardizing orthography.

The Azerbaijani Turks had already adopted a Latin-based alphabet in 1923, and agitation for other Turks to follow was mounting, but in 1925 the Turkmen

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intellectuals still had little interest in Latinization. They were willing to work within socialist parameters, but with their script. They had not yet determined the degree to which their reformed Arabic script would be Turkmen, with respect to its distinction from other Turkic reformed Arabic scripts, and Soviet, with respect to lexical content and accommodation of Russian terms. Still, Turkmen Academic Commission members clearly had no intention of abandoning their work toward a Turkmen reformed Arabic script. This makes very clear the connection between language/script and national identity. Symbols do matter and the fact that the Turkmen intellectuals were laboring over the details of their script reforms and arguing over the extent to which it should differ, no matter how slightly, demonstrates the degree to which they viewed their alphabet as a preeminent symbol of their national identity. It also demonstrates a desire to carve out a Turkmen national identity via critical cultural claims.

1925 Reformed Reformed Arabic Script and Other Politicized Language Issues

In 1925 various state entities became involved in examining the reforms and even further reforms were enacted. For example, on 14 June 1925 the T.S.S.R.'s People's Commissars' Soviet [TSSR Halk Komissiar Soveti] sanctioned further alphabet reforms which had been suggested by the People's Education Commissariat [Magarif Halk Komissarlygy] and the State Scholarly Council [Döwlet Alymlar Geňesi].[^1] This reform was related to preparation of textbooks for schools in which

Geldiew played a large role. In this 1925 reform, in addition to the above mentioned accommodation of Russian words, they finally worked out the long [i], [y] phonemes.

Geldiew continued to publish articles about education, language and literature in daily newspapers. Two, which appeared in the newspaper Türkmenistan, are indicative of his professional concern. The first appeared in 1926 entitled "In all of our schools or in just the middle level schools? The question of which language we should teach in." The second was a 1930 article entitled "The long vowel sound and its role in Turkmen language." In these the author continued to express the idea of his earlier works which expounded on the distinguishing characteristic of the long vowel sounds in Turkmen.172

Despite the narrow focus of these articles, they addressed issues of major significance. The first article tackled the issue of Russian language and what role it would play in Turkmen society.173 One of the heated debates of language reform was the degree to which foreign words should be purged from the Turkmen dialect. Some literati wanted to free the language of all Persian and Arabic words, but Russian

172M. Geldiew, "Bütün mekdeplerimizdemi ya ki yeke orta mekdeplerimizdemi? Haşsy dilde okatmak meselesi (Çekişme ýoly bilen)," Türkmenistan, 12 April 1926, and "Turkmen dilinide uzyn çekimli ses ve onuň roly (käri)," Türkmenistan, 18-19 May 1930.

173Some of the debates along these lines included the question of creating Turkmen neologisms to support cultural, scientific and technical aims. Geldiew stated in a paper he delivered at the May 1929 Third All-Turkmen Soviet Conference, that, at least for the time being, it would be beneficial for the Turkmen to borrow words from Russian; a possible indicator that while he was a strong Turkmen nationalist, he held no animosity toward Russian culture. Söyegow, 1993, p. 53.
loan words presented a different kind of political problem, as well as a linguistic one. The second article indicates that the issue of the degree to which Turkmen was distinguishable from other Turkic dialects had not yet been resolved amongst the Turkmen intellectuals. In this article, Geldiew was still holding to his view that there are peculiarities in Turkmen which make it linguistically distinct from other Turkic dialects and these should be reflected in its alphabet. These articles express concern about language and education, which continued to be pressing issues for Turkmen intellectuals. However, in 1926 a formal congress to discuss Latinization of Turkic dialects rendered Arabic script reform inconsequential.

By the mid-1920s newspaper articles advocating Latinization of Turkmen were becoming widespread. Hezretguly Durdyew believes that it was the pressure from such public demands which drove the Turkmen People's Education Commissariat to become directly involved in the Arabic-based alphabet reform process. Täçmyradow implies that it was a lack of cooperation between Turkic groups which ultimately led to Latinization. Without being specific, he seems to be indicating that Moscow was growing dissatisfied with nationalism and its expression in alphabets. He explains that there was no coordination between Turkmen, Kazak, Uzbek and other intellectuals, and that in some regions there was no educated class to consider language reform. "There was no unity in orthographic work," he continues, "In the


175 He refers to "Elifba Meselesi," Türkmenistan, 12 January 1925, No. 9 as one which motivated the Commission.
perfection [standardization] of literary languages, the numerous conceptions [mesele] needed to be linked together. With respect to this, the First All-Union Turcological Congress was very important.\textsuperscript{176} While this is all essentially accurate, the more salient point is that Moscow had decided years earlier that the Turks would Latinize and by 1925-26 the central administration was ready to see that through.

\textit{An Abrupt end to Arabic-script reform in Central Asia}

The era of Arabic alphabet reform, the early 1920s, was truly the era of Turkmenification. The latitude afforded Turkmen intellectuals who worked to foster a modern Turkmen identity would not be seen again in the Soviet period. Moscow had developed an early interest in the paths of language and alphabet, as agents of culture and potential carriers of socialism, and by the mid-1920s had begun to administrate and orchestrate them from its centralized position. Latinization, as a program organized and paid for by Moscow, is an example of this centralization of cultural activity. The years of Latinization may be considered as transitional ones both for language and culture as well as for centralization of cultural power. Proposals for Arabic-based alphabet reform and Latinization occurred simultaneously in Central Asia; this is often reduced to a 'Latinizers versus Arabists' dichotomy. During natsionalizatsiia, or korenizatsiia, and the era of Arabic script reform cultural considerations were largely in the hands of native leaders. By the end of the 1930s and Cyrillicization the decisions were being made by Moscow alone, in its centralized

\textsuperscript{176}Täçmyradow, 1984, p. 163.
authoritative position. While the era of Latinization is also a clear example of the politicization of language and language policy, it is brief and bridges the two more specifically oriented periods of language and politics: korenizatsiya and russification.

Abrupt though it may seem, Arabic script reform ended in Turkmenistan between 1926-1927. By the mid-1920s Central Asian alphabet reform had grown beyond intellectual circles and several Party leaders were strong advocates of abandoning the Arabic script altogether. In 1926 the First All-Union Turcological Congress was organized to discuss the Turks' adoption of Latin-based scripts in place of the Arabic-based ones. The decision was made at that conference and all Turkic areas were required to comply.\textsuperscript{177} The individuals, like Geldiew, who had worked on Arabic script reform began work on Latinization without leaving much evidence of their thoughts on the matter. It was not the end of discussions of nationalism, Turkic-ness or Turkmen-ness, but the tenor had changed drastically. Nationalization was fast becoming an unacceptable aspiration. Socialism was perceived to be a unifying force while nationalism divided peoples. More emphasis began to be placed on the cultural unification of Soviet peoples. One route to unification was to organize the peoples under an international script. This unification and internationalization of the peoples was one of the fundamental designs of Latinization in the Soviet Union, and provides another example of non-linguistic, political motivation for script reform.

\textsuperscript{177}Stenograficheskii otchet, 1926, pp. 404-405
CHAPTER 3

Latinization

"The Unifying Alphabet"

If we know the Latin alphabet, we will live,
learning our work will be made easy.
If we begin to work at these letters,
the alphabet will unite Russian & Turkmen.
Muhammet Evezof, "The Unifying Alphabet"178

Latinization during the Imperial Period

Debate over the benefits of Latinization were not limited to the Soviet period. In fact, western and Soviet studies of Soviet reforms include at least brief discussion of the earlier proposals and the intellectuals who made them, demonstrating that Soviet activities were not always unique and that the Imperial period must be taken into consideration. In doing so, we see that pre-Soviet proposals for Latinization by Turks in the Imperial period were not symbolic, but very practical measures. Turkic intellectuals were consistently concerned with literacy and overcoming Russian cultural domination. Mid-nineteenth century recommendations for script reform stressed cultural survival in proposals for both Latinization (in Azerbaijan) and Arabic alphabet reform (among Tatars). In the twentieth-century Arabic script reform projects, the

concern for literacy and cultural advancement was also tied to cultivation of national identities in a way which was denounced when, during *latinizatsiia*, the forging of Soviet, socialist Turkic identities escalated and 'denationalization' superseded *natsionalizatsiia*. Additionally, the Imperial era language/script proposals demonstrate a deep desire to promote unity among Turks, not through symbolism, but through a re-awakening of culture and strengthened cultural ties. The Azerbaijani Turk who proposed Latinization did so only after he found no support for a reformed Arabic script. The issue wasn't script, but standardization and codification to encourage literacy and enhance cultural affiliation. As will be seen, while Soviet calls for Latinization were designed to separate Turks from their heritage, these early proposals were made specifically to strengthen them. Some intellectuals' realized that even shared culture, as mentioned in chapter one, and recognition of Turkic-ness, could be at risk. Their proposals were made to foster and enhance membership in the Muslim Turkic community.

While I call the late 1920s and early 1930s the era of Latinization because it was the first Soviet attempt to bring a Latin-based script to Turkmen and most other Turks, latinization was not a new concept to the Turks or Russians. According to the Soviet Turkologist Yakovlev, the Orthodox Christian Yakuts of North-Eastern Siberia had been searching for an alphabet since the middle of the 19th century. Between 1850-1917 they prepared and tried five different alphabets including Cyrillic which

\[Toynbee, 1928, p. 227.\]
had been introduced to them by Russian missionaries.\textsuperscript{180} As early as 1918, the Yakuts were the first to decide on a Latin based script (again introduced by missionaries), however, geographic remoteness and religious differences prevented them from having much influence on other Turkic groups.\textsuperscript{181}

Although they were not the first to reform, it was the Azerbaijani Turks who influenced the other Turkic groups and essentially created a cultural revolution.\textsuperscript{182} The writer Mirza Fath 'Ali Akundzadä (Akhundov) (1812-1878) made the first serious proposal for the introduction of a Latin script in Azerbaijan in the 1860s.\textsuperscript{183} Akundzadä represented the educated Azerbaijani elite who were working to create a modern Turkic culture in spite of imperial Russian domination.

They were the perpetuators in Caucasia of a cultural renaissance that embraced the entire Turkish world...from the second half of the nineteenth century to the early twentieth century. The period was characterized by a rediscovery of history, literature, and philosophy and by a debate about politics, social change, religion and morality, and historical identity.\textsuperscript{184}

While Akundzadä is widely recognized for his promotion of Latinization, he first advanced proposals to reform the existing Arabic script.\textsuperscript{185} Tadeusz

\textsuperscript{180} Simsir, 1992, p. 97-98.


\textsuperscript{184} Altstadt, 1992, pp. 50-52.

\textsuperscript{185} Şimşir, 1991, p. 2.
Swietochowski provides a quote from Akundzadă which he explains was an early endorsement of a simplified Arabic script, an idea which grew out of larger discussions in the Turkic and Persian speech communities.¹⁸⁶

[he saw reform as] 'a medicine with the effect that the letters of this script dating back to the barbarian era would be written jointly,...that the letters would be distinguished one from another by their shape without recourse to the dots. Then, everyone in a very short time and without much exertion would be able to read in his [own] native language.'¹⁸⁷

Akundzadă's greatest concern was not strictly about which script Turks would use, but that they educate themselves. "His plan, was foremost about introducing a new alphabet which would facilitate the expansion of literacy."¹⁸⁸ And, although Akhundzadă promoted secularism,¹⁸⁹ one Turkish journal article tells Akhundzadă's story as one initially interested in the Islamic community at large; not one limited to Turks, but specifically including Persian speakers. The author explains that Akhundzadă felt that "[Arabic-based alphabet] reform was not to be made solely in the


¹⁸⁹Swietochowski, 1995, p. 27.
name of Azeri or of the Turkic world," he created a writing system capable of wider application, calling it "Islam Alfabesi."\(^{190}\)

In 1863 Akhundzadä took a pamphlet detailing his Islamic Alphabet to Istanbul where the "Ottoman Scholarly Society" evaluated it, but declared that "while [the proposed reform] was useful and suitable in theory, in application there would be great difficulties, and so it [was] necessary to forgo [reform] at [that] time."\(^{191}\) So, Akhundzadä proposed a Latin-based script, but that too was rejected. However, for his cultural and intellectual endeavors, Akhundzadä received royal recognition and the corresponding medal.\(^{192}\) Undiscouraged, Akhundzadä took his proposal to the Shah of Persia, but the Persians were not enthusiastic. He returned to Baku where he wrote "Eliba Hakkında Poema" [Ode to the Alphabet] in which he severely criticized both the Persians and the Ottomans.\(^{193}\)


\(^{193}\)[Kurtulan, 1990, p. 35. I include this information not only to record Akhundzadä's activities with respect to script, but also to demonstrate that Caucasian and Central Asian Turks interacted meaningfully with Ottoman Turks. A frequent question about Turkic alphabet history is "How much influence did Atatürk's reforms have on other Turks?" While Ottoman/Turkish influence was wide and significant (yet did not stem solely from Atatürk), the current of intellectual stimulation was not limited to an easterly course. Interaction may be a better term than influence. Kushner does an excellent job of demonstrating that Turks from Central Asia, the Caucasus and the Volga region emigrated to the Ottoman Empire where they made]
Failure apparently brought Akhundzadə to new conclusions, he proposed a 42 letter Cyrillic-based alphabet for the Azerbaijani Turks. According to him, The Arabic script, which is not based on letters nor on syllabic structure, is difficult to learn. In order for the underdeveloped countries of the East to participate in the race for modernization, this script needs to be peeled away.

Modernization was the goal and script was merely a tool for attaining that, the playwrite was willing to take any promising path; later Soviet Turks handle their situation similarly.

Akhundzadə’s supporters attempted to continue his work to Latinize, but met with resistance from Tsarist Russia and the muslim clergy, who saw a departure from the Arabic script as blasphemous and no reforms took place. However, the issue re-emerged again after the Bolshevik victory. Only a few years after the end of the Russian civil war highly placed intellectuals and political leaders began to endorse significant intellectual contributions. David Kushner, The Rise of Turkish Nationalism, 1876-1908 (London: Billing & Sons Ltd., 1977).


Latinization in Central Asia (and Russia) as the true path toward internationalization.\textsuperscript{197}

\textit{Historiography}

In Western scholars' explanations of the complexities of Latinization among the Soviet Turks, questions remain as to the force behind the shift from Arabic script. Disagreement lies in the characterization of the heavy hand of Moscow in forcing Latinization versus the Turkic intellectuals' desire to abandon the Arabic script.

Edward Allworth wrote

The local leaders resisted the 1926-28 alphabet change, though Russian voices openly urged Latinization on the Uzbeks. Moscow let these exhortations originate mostly from local agents, publicly professing to allow the Uzbeks to decide the question as they wished while privately ordering Russians and Uzbek Communists in Uzbekistan to accomplish Russian objectives.\textsuperscript{198}

William Fierman portrays the Uzbek intellectuals as a group with a myriad of strong opinions and objects to Allworth's simplification. He also points to Turkey's potential influence.

...events in Turkey offer a useful backdrop for viewing alphabet change in Uzbekistan. Although it is easy to assume that the hidden hand of Moscow


\textsuperscript{198}Allworth, 1964, p. 172.
must have been the decisive factor leading to adoption of the Latin script, the Turkish case demonstrates that other circumstances about the same time also led to abandonment of Arabic writing and adoption of Latin letters.\textsuperscript{199}

Audrey Altstadt, writing from the Azerbaijani point of view, sees the role of Moscow as having usurped a Turkic issue and incorporating it into a policy of centralized "cultural control."

One fundamental element of culture policy was alphabet 'reform.'...When the Bolsheviks supported Latinization, taking sides in an existing debate, they saw in the alphabet change a rare chance to cut off the Azerbaijani Turks from the new, emphatically anti-Bolshevik, Turkish republic [which would not Latinize until 1928]. Over time, Latinization would also block new generations from reading pre-Soviet publications that might perpetuate religion or 'bourgeois' ideas of liberty or cultural autonomy.\textsuperscript{200}

Ayşe Rorlich's work on Volga Tatars points out that while there were also divergent views among Tatars, Tatarization was the quest of the most outspoken. This meant opposition to Latinization.

The significance of the decree [to Latinize] was manyfold. Overnight it produced an instant crop of millions of illiterate Muslims who found that a wall had been erected between them and their pre-Soviet cultural heritage. Another major impact was the elimination of a vital channel of communication with the Islamic \textit{umma} [community] outside the Soviet Union...\textsuperscript{201}

Terry Martin's access to Russian language archival sources leads him to characterize "\textit{latinizatsiia} as a form of cultural pan-Turkism."\textsuperscript{202} Expanding on this, he writes

\textsuperscript{199}Fierman, 1991, p. 84.

\textsuperscript{200}Altstadt, 1992, p. 124.


\textsuperscript{202}Martin, 1996, p. 802.
The most important division in the movement was between the politicians and professors. The politicians, mostly leaders in the Turkic republics, were primarily concerned with driving the Arabic script out of their republics. The professors had a different crusade: unification.

This would seem to ignore the nationalistic interests which had developed among many intellectuals and language planners by the 1920s and which are so strongly voiced in the many records they left in their own languages. Not to mention the fact that 'nationalistic tendencies' were precisely the reason many language planners were jailed or executed.

Working from sources in non-Turkic languages, Simon Crisp sees the impact on smaller peoples to have been almost useful.

Printing was not well organized in the Arabic script (with the notable exception of Kazan’ and to a lesser extent Baku), a situation which was to some extent alleviated by the introduction of Latin alphabets in that this allowed the widespread implementation of typographical processes.

Yet he also feels that the arguments made at the 1926 Turcoiogical congress, where Latinization was agreed upon, were "extensively rehearsed." Without expounding further, he seems to be implying that the congress was a show for a decision which had already been made. And speaking to the motivation for the decision, he, like Fierman, feels that relations between Istanbul and Baku "gave considerable impetus to the whole process of latinisation."
Perhaps each depiction is accurate about some facet of Latinization. It was a shift which took place over a period of several years, involved many committees with varying agendas and was not a static issue. With many sources still unavailable (for instance, some of Geldiew’s papers or presentations) it is difficult to know exactly what the Turkmen language planners thought about abandoning their work on the reformed Arabic script. However, we do know that Geldiew and Böriew continued to focus on practical issues of codifying orthography, representing long vowel phonemes, creating textbooks and increasing literacy. What While I suspect that they would not have abandoned the Arabic script if they had not been required to, there does not seem to have been public dissension. They may have been interested in helping to further socialist agenda by assisting with the new ‘international’ script. Or, they may have been strong armed into working on Latinization. Whatever their individual motivations, we know that their fundamental concern was in raising literacy. As with Akhoundzadă, they came to feel that literacy was more important than the mere symbolism of a script; like the Tatar Jadidists they wanted to see their people survive culturally.206

Stenographic records and newspaper articles are the most informative sources for understanding, if not all the motivations, at least many of the script reformers’ undertakings. The most often referenced stenographic record is that of the 1926 Turcological Congress held in Baku at which the decision to abandon the Arabic script

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206 K.A. Böeri, "EliipBi ozgerçek däl.," Tyrkenistaan, No. 101, 5 May 1930, p. 3. It is interesting that Böriew uses no ending on his name here, neither the Turkmen -oglu, nor the Russian -ev.
and adopt a Latin one was made. The resolution of this congress implies that all Soviet Turks (except for a couple of radical, trouble-making Tatars) were in agreement over the adoption of a Latin script, and secondary sources echo this. While much pontificating took place at this conference, the real work was done in the many committees and congresses which followed. By questioning the substantiveness of this Congress, and examining the impetus for Latinization, Turkic identity formation may be viewed from a wider perspective. Rather than an academic assembly endorsed by all Turkic intellectuals interested in internationalizing their script in an effort to socialize their society, evidence suggests that we might view the 1926 Turcological Congress as a program organized and paid for by the central government in Moscow to support its goal of building a progressive, unified Soviet culture in a manner which separated 'backward' Turks from their Islamic heritage. This viewpoint also reminds us that the Turks of the early twentieth century were not always in control of their cultural development. Terry Martin’s depiction of a division between professors and politicians accurately indicates that there were some

207 *Stenograficheskii otchet*, 1926.


209 Toynbee, 1928, p. 226, wrote that the Presidium of the Central Executive Committee of the USSR made a grant of 600,000 rubles to support Latinization in 1927 in addition to the 500,000 it had granted to the New Alphabet Committee in Transcaucasia. Martin, 1996, p. 809, confirms this with archival records.
Turks who were willing to following a Moscow oriented path and others who were interested in pursuing the interests of Turks. The latter were the individuals who worked on Arabic script reform right up until the eve of the 1926 congress.\footnote{Geldiew and the Turkmen language reformers worked on proposals at least through 1925 and probably into 1926. The Uzbeks reaffirmed their commitment to the Arabic script just two months before the 1926 congress, Fierman, 1991, p. 84. The Tatars and Kazaks resisted even during the Latinization process.}
Soviet Latinization

*All those who oppose the new alphabet are enemies of the Turkic nation.*

*The new alphabet will open the enlightened path (yşyk yol) to the oppressed nations of the east.*

Slogans from *İslk JoL*, 18 March 1924, p. 1

In 1922, Nariman Narimanov, the chairman of the Council of People’s Commissars of the Azerbaijan S.S.R., advocated a new Latin-based script. This was one of the first calls for reform made by an official; such a call, from a highly placed official, indicates that the Party was interested in alphabet reform from very early on. However, the Muslim clergy continued to object to the idea of rejecting the sacred script, and they were joined by local intellectuals who preferred alteration of the already existing Arabic-based script. That sentiment was shared by Turkic intellectuals in other regions who wished neither to reject their Muslim heritage nor to relinquish the reformed scripts they had worked to modify in their struggle toward a modern Turkic identity.

Yet, Union-wide, Russian language newspaper and journal articles urged Turks to renounce the Arabic script and embrace the more universal Latin alphabet. Proponents of reform to a Latin-based alphabet dragged out every argument (mostly

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non-linguistic) they could in order to muster up support for rejection of the Arabic script. Newspaper articles explained that not only was there a lack of vowel representation, but that the script was written from right to left while the numerals were written from left to right, making their simultaneous usage cumbersome.\textsuperscript{213}

There were also arguments that the Arabic script was exceedingly difficult to learn and that it was the largest factor in widespread illiteracy.\textsuperscript{214}

The editor of the Azerbaijani newspaper \textit{Sarqi Rus}, Mamed Aga Shakhtatinski, who had been a long time advocate of latinization, published his anti-Arabic script views in the union-wide newspaper \textit{Zhizin' Natsional'nostei}. The appearance of such articles in the official organ of \textit{Narkomnats} and the public endorsement of Latinization by the chairman of the Council of People's Commissars of the Azerbaijani S.S.R., Nariman Narimanov,\textsuperscript{215} both in 1922, indicate that although Moscow did not discourage initiatives on Arabic script development, the leadership was supporting Latinization. It appears that Azerbaijan was again the vanguard in the proposal to Latinize, this time in the person of the Azerbaijani political activist Samedaga Agamalyoglu.

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\textsuperscript{214}The Japanese experience seems to refute the validity of this propaganda and implies that literacy problems lie not with script, but with social programs. Avram Galanti, "Arap ve Japon Yazıları," \textit{Tanzimat'tan Cumhuriyet'e Alfa ve Tartışmalar}, Hüseyin Yorulmaz, ed., (İstanbul: Kitabevi, 1995), pp. 150-156.

Agamalyoglu had met with Lenin in August 1922 and "reported to him that Azerbaijan's workers would welcome the forthcoming introduction of the Latin alphabet." He had been writing articles to promote Latinization in which he claimed that "the Arabic alphabet was an instrument of the old Muslim culture, while the Latin alphabet was a tool of the new socialist culture." This utopian approach to language policy is explained by William Fierman's point that Agamalyoglu's qualifications for heading Latinization efforts were political rather than linguistic.216 He was not alone. As is often the case with language reform, Latinization was a political movement shaped by extra-code factors rather than a linguistic one. The purpose of Latinization was to de-nationalize the scripts of the Soviet peoples, not to better reflect a speech code. Shaktakinskii demonstrates this by pointing to one of the most often cited non-language based reasons for latinization,

The Moslem world needs an international alphabet. The Latin alphabet is not only international; it is pananthropic. It is known also to those nations which, like the Russian, do not use it. The Latin alphabet is known even by educated Moslems in Asia and Africa.217

A reasonable question arises here: Why would the central government be interested in Latinization when only a decade after implementation, they would supplant it with Cyrillicization? In addition to the 'internationalization' fervor, the idea of bringing the Soviet people together culturally was paramount. The new Soviet man would be Soviet first, not Muslim, Turkestanian or Turk. Cyrillicization did not


yet seem feasible as bitterness toward the Russian Imperial policies and resistance to things Russian lingered among the people who had been under Russian imperial rule. In response to this, resistance, even anti-Russian-ness, had been permissible during natsionalizatsiia as the nascent government struggled to step into the Imperial shoes without appearing colonialist. Additionally,

it seemed most improbable that the Cyrillic alphabet with its Russian associations could be introduced in this early period without evoking a strong wave of nationalism... ⁴¹

But, there were many who did not want to wait until Cyrillicization was feasible, and this gave Moscow an opportunity to separate the Turks from at least one aspect of their Muslim heritage sooner than later. First Secretary of the Communist Party of Uzbekistan Äkmäl Ikramov explained,

[Arabic scripts] had to be discarded because if we had not discarded them once and for all, we would not be able to free ourselves very easily from the noxious Muslim philosophy and from Arabic scholasticism. ⁴²

The symbolism of script cannot be overlooked here. Moscow viewed the Arabic script as synonymous with pan-Turkist, pan-Arabist, Islamic sentiment that would hinder the advancement of socialism. Arabic scripts were backward, while Latin-based scripts signified modernizaty and progress. Alphabets are symbolically powerful, hence, the political involvement. However, many Turkic intellectuals had just begun to make headway with their reformed Arabic scripts. They had no interest in abandoning those efforts.

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⁴¹Winner, 1952-52, p. 137.

⁴²Cited in Fierman, 1991, p. 75. This leader's purge is noted in chapter 2.
Azerbaijan alone forged ahead with Latinization in the early 1920s. In 1922
the New Turkic Alphabet Committee was created in Baku, Azerbaijan for the purpose
of establishing a new Latin-based alphabet for use by Turks in the Soviet Union.\textsuperscript{220} The committee created the \emph{Jen'i jol} [New Path] journal to promote the new alphabet as
well as purification of the Turkic lexicon, that is, a move away from etymologically
Persian and Arabic terminology.\textsuperscript{221} The Central Executive Committee of Azerbaijan
announced adoption of the Latin-based script in 1924.\textsuperscript{222} From there the campaign
spread quickly to neighboring Caucasian Turks in Georgia and Armenia. \emph{IsLk Jol}
[Enlightened Path] was created in Tiflis in 1924 as a supplement to \emph{Jen'i Fikir} [New
Idea].\textsuperscript{223} These journals, and soon others, existed to promote ideas of the new
progressive culture Moscow was encouraging. Meanwhile, in Moscow, the
Nationalities Commissariat had organized the Commission of the Latinization of
Writing. In addition to citing the right to left direction of writing in Arabic and its
lack of vowels, supporters repeatedly noted the superiority of the Latin script's
"international" character.\textsuperscript{224}

While Turkic language reformers were engrossed in nationally oriented, Arabic
alphabet reforms, they were obliged to take time to defend the continued use of


\textsuperscript{221}Anti-Arabic and anti-Persian poems appeared in several issues. For
reproductions, see Şimşir, 1992, pp. 101-106.

\textsuperscript{222}Altstadt, 1992, p. 124.

\textsuperscript{223}Şimşir, 1992, pp. 109-117.

\textsuperscript{224}Fierman, 1991, p. 76.
Arabic in the face of attacks by 'Latinizers'. Tatars were especially resistant. Kazan Tatars had developed an advanced printing and publishing industry, as well as an Arabic script based literature which was read by several other Turkic groups. They were also exporting Arabic language material to Muslim regions beyond Soviet borders. In addition to cultural considerations, they resisted the new alphabet because they did not want to lose their superior place in these industries.\textsuperscript{225} As Fierman notes, Moscow hoped to undermine the influential role of Tatars who "had achieved a high degree of literacy in the old alphabet, but whom Moscow viewed with suspicion because of their pan-Turkic proclivities."\textsuperscript{226}

Resistance did not dissuade the New Alphabet Committee. Once the Latin alphabet was established in Transcaucasia, the committee began to work in the north Caucasus, among the Ingush, Chechens, Ossetians, Başkurts.\textsuperscript{227} However, the 'mountain peoples' were clear in their sentiment toward the New Latin Alphabet. Chechens fired upon and wounded the person who first brought the new alphabet to the mountains, and then, they "shot up the alphabet."\textsuperscript{228} Despite such pockets of resistance, progress was slowly being made, for example, the Kazak Commissariat of Education recommended study of the possibility of adopting a Latin script. A debate ensued in the national papers \textit{Novyi Vostok} and \textit{Zhizn' Natsionalnostei} over whether

\textsuperscript{225} Toynbee, 1928, 224.

\textsuperscript{226} Fierman, 1991, p. 75.

\textsuperscript{227} Şimşir, 1992, p. 116.

\textsuperscript{228} Iakovlev, \textit{Stenograficheskii otech}, 1926, p. 219.
the adoption of Latin script should be undertaken at all and if so, how and when. In the midst of this flurry of opinions, the All-Union Scientific Association of Oriental Studies suggested that an 'unofficial' All-Union Turcological Congress be organized. Between 1924 and 1926 commissions were formed, committees made petitions to the USSR Central Executive Committee and in August 1925, the USSR Council of People's Commissars resolved that a congress would be held in December 1925 to discuss problems of orthography and terminology for the Turkic languages. In other words, although this congress was organized as an "unofficial" scholarly deliberation, preparations had involved every official rung on the Communist ladder. By 1925 there was very little about language policy that was remained unofficial.

*The Baku 1926 Turkological Congress*

The initial Union-wide meeting to discuss the Soviet Turks' adoption of a Latin-based script took place at the First All-Union Turkological Congress in Baku, Azerbaijan 28 February - 6 March 1926. Ninety-eight Turks and Tatars from every region, including the Turkish Republic, and thirty-three foreigners gathered in Baku, Azerbaijan to address the Soviet Turks' adoption of a Latin based script. The

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229Fierman, 1991, p. 79.

230Paul Wexler, 1993, p. 31, writes, "the first major international linguistic conference of a Soviet language was convened [14-21 November] 1926 [in the Belorussian capital Minsk]..." However, the Baku Turkological Congress was convened nine months earlier, in February 1926, see *Stenograficheskii otchet*, 1926.
presidium consisted of twenty-two, including Bekki E. Berdiew, a Turkmen.\textsuperscript{231} While this conference has been highlighted in secondary sources, lesser known sources indicate that too much emphasis has been placed on this one event.\textsuperscript{232} It was politically significant, but the linguistic significance of the decisions made at this congress were actually far less so than those made at the many that followed.

Joseph Castagne, who, immediately after the conference, published a unique summary, along with commentary, background, details of the election of the presidium and discussion of the participants' activities outside the actual conference - for example the reception at the Azerbaijan National Opera House - was most probably himself present at the conference. The Turkish scholar Bilal Şimşir, who believes that this 1926 conference was a show orchestrated by Moscow and not something that the Turkic peoples actually desired, relies heavily on Castagne's work.\textsuperscript{233} Simon Crisp's description of the conference debates as "extensively rehearsed" corresponds with Şimşir's view.\textsuperscript{234}

Şimşir writes that the first priority in the preparations for this 1926 conference had been to see to it that the Soviet people of the East had the prestige of being the

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{231}Joseph Castagne, \textit{Le Congres de Turkologie de Bakou} (Mars 1926) (Paris: Editions Ernest Leroux, 1926), p. 22. Castagne also lists Bekir Vahaboglu Çobanzade as a Turkmen, but in the stenographic record he is registered as a Crimean Tatar from Baku - the Persian ending "zade" is uncommon in Turkmen names, though common in Azerbaijan; Şimşir, working from Castagne, as opposed to the stenographic record, repeats this error.

\textsuperscript{232}Şimşir, 1992.

\textsuperscript{233}Şimşir, 1992.

\textsuperscript{234}Crisp, 1989, p. 27.}
first to address the issue; that is deal with the matter before Turkey. The Congress was actually several years in the planning and a letter dated September 1925 from the Turkish Consulate in Baku to the Turkish Government provides some insight into the behind the scenes preparation.

The Russians, who had been insisting that the Congress should be in Moscow, finally agreed to Baku. Nonetheless, they insisted on having the organization be undertaken by the Communist Party and not be left to patriots, and they made it a pre-condition.235

The Baku Conference went ahead later than planned, but nonetheless, as planned. The delegates voted that the Soviet Turks would replace their backward Arabic script with a modern, international Latin one. They then left the matter of the new alphabet up to local authorities, who created their own versions.

The impression had been created that the idea for the Congress came from the Soviet Turks themselves. But unlike the early reforms of the Arabic script, adoption of Latin script was clearly controlled by Moscow. Evidence suggests that Party organs had taken over the reform process as early as 1922, when "by decree of the Board of the People's Commissariat of Nationalities, a special commission...was established at the Commissariat for the purpose of devising a national script based on the Latin alphabet."236 Four of the Turkmen delegates were members of Narkompros

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236Schlesinger, p. 125.
(Commissariat of Enlightenment) and one a representative to Central Executive Committee of the USSR (TsIK SSSR). These conference participants were not independent scholars, but representatives of Soviet organs. During those years it was not possible to be both. Just as there was 'no neutral art,' there was no neutral scholarship. These facts, in addition to the financial backing from Moscow, lend themselves to Şimşir's opinions that the 1926 Congress on Latinization was in fact more about show than substance, and that the decision to supplant the Arabic scripts with a Latin-based one had already been made by the Moscow leadership before the Congress took place.

The All-Union Central Committee on the New Turkic Alphabet

Shortly thereafter, in May 1927, the Executive Committee of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR (VTsIK) ordered the creation of a permanent national organization, which formalized Latinization as an official matter. The All-Union Central Committee on the New Turkic Alphabet (Vsesoiuznyi Tsentral'nyi Komitet Novogo Tiurkskogo Alfavita - VTsK NTA) was created to see through the adoption of a common Latin-based script by all of the Turkic peoples living in the Soviet

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238Altstadt, 1992, p. 124, citing CEC CPSU resolution, 1925.

239Winner, p. 139.
Union and to assist in standardizing and unifying the many Latinization projects at local levels.

The Committee met in Baku June 1927 to debate and vote on every sound, letter and diacritic. The goal was to create a unified Turkic Latin-based alphabet, standardize its orthography so that it could be employed by all dialects, and assist in the creation of literary languages. From the seventeen local Latinization projects, they compiled one standardized Latin-based alphabet, officially named the New Turkic Alphabet - NTA. The problem of finding symbols to represent the specifically Turkic sounds was solved by the use of diacritics and creation of new symbols.

Kumușaly Böriew, a Turkmen representative to the All-Union Central Committee for the NTA, attended the first meeting held in Baku, 3-7 June 1927, in order to give an account of the work being done to Latinize in Turkmenistan. He also took a moment to stress the need to continue work on practical problems such as creating textbooks and codifying an orthography. Geldiew was still plugging away at orthography, although he had given up on an Arabic script and was now working in the Latin-based script. He had not forsaken the issue of long vowels and insisted that

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241 Crisp, p. 27.

242 Winner, p. 139 citing the Committee’s Stenographic record.

243 Kul’tura i Pis’mennost’ Vostoka, No. 2, 1928, p. 56, cited in Winner, p. 139.

244 Stenograficheskii otchet pervogo plenuma Vsesoiuznogo tsentral’nogo komiteta novogo tiurkskogo alfавita, Baku, 3-7 June 1927, pp. 57-58, cited in Tâçmyradow, 1984, p. 164.
the alphabet accommodate their expression. The proposed unified New Turkic Alphabet had nine vowels, but this was not enough to signify the long vowel phonemes with individual graphemes. Geldiew proposed that seven more graphemes be added to the unified alphabet for a total of sixteen. The proposal was accepted and the phonemes were represented with double vowel graphemes: aa, oo, ôô, uu, yy, ii, bb.245

The committee left to the local party cells the monumental task of introducing the Latin script to the people. Serious work began in Turkmenistan to implement the New Turkic Alphabet upon the State Academic Soviet's announcement in June 1927 that the Turkmen script would thereafter be Latin-based.246 On 5 December 1927 the newspaper Türkmenistan began following the new orthographic rules.247 Articles became more aggressive in their promotion of Latinization. One even attacked the Arabic script by illustrating a potentially common problem which was used similarly by later reformers in the Turkish Republic: If a fly were to land on a page where the Arabic script had been written, the mark it could make on the page would appear to be a diacritic and could make the difference between words.248


246"Harpairy latynlaşdyrýarys," Türkmenistan, 29 June 1927 and "Latyn esasynda kabul edilen Türkmen elifbasy," Türkmenistan, 30 June 1927, p. 3.


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Some cells were not very successful and when called upon to explain, blamed the lack of popular support for the New Turkic Alphabet on the residual "pre-revolutionary, anti-Russian, nationalistic traditions of the intelligentsia, who had the support of the masses." This was not completely inaccurate. Some groups, like the Tatars and the Kazaks, resisted openly, viewing "latinization as a new kind of colonialism." Some Northern Caucasian people met the new alphabet and the individuals attempting to introduce it, with "hired bandits and drawn daggers." Harsh criticism from Istanbul journals, like Yeni Kafkasya, accused Moscow of forcing this issue on the Soviet Turks. In response to opposition, letters signed "Latinci" (Latinist) and with proletariat names like "Gyzyl Asker" [Red Soldier] began appearing in Turkmen, Uzbek, Kirgiz, Kazakh and Tiflis newspapers to encourage citizens to embrace the new script. Even though the Yakuts and Azerbaijani Turks had willingly adopted a Latin-based script much earlier, they too rejected the NTA

The original story is concerned with the mark the fly would deposit on the paper, or that he might track ink across it.


250 Winner, p. 139-142.


252 Şimşir, p. 113, 119.
and refused to replace their own alphabets with it. This could be interpreted as a refusal to forgo work they did to nationalize their alphabet.

In addition to general opposition, the practical problem of implementation persisted. Printing continued to be an obstacle as there was no Latin type. "Even when this type was finally obtained from Leningrad and Tiflis there were no native printers who knew the Latin alphabet, and hurried intensive one-month courses for printers had to be organized."  

"In January 1928 the second plenary session of the All-Union Central Committee on the New Turkic Alphabet, meeting in Tashkent...decided that complete unification would have to be abandoned because of the marked phonetic differences between the languages." At this point the committee members were becoming frustrated and couldn't be concerned over which particular alphabet version was used, as long as it was Latin-based. At this same meeting, it was decided that the committee's efforts had in fact achieved basic success. There was some residual resistance reported in Kazakhstan, but overall, progress was underway; 'societies of friends of the new alphabet' and public organizations, at both the national and local level, had been established throughout the Turkic regions to promote Latinization.

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253 *Stenograficheskii otchet VTsK NTA*, 1927, pp. 79, 321, and note 33, cited in Winner, p. 141


newspapers had begun to print columns in the new alphabet, and daily lessons were being published in the press.\textsuperscript{256}

At the third meeting of the VTsKNTA, held in Kazan' 18-23 December 1928, it was reported that "the Arabists had been broken in Kazakhstan" and all republics were now carrying out the unification program. The new alphabet had been introduced into almost all of the Central Asian municipal schools, teachers trained in NTA were teaching it in the countryside, and publishing in the new Turkic alphabet was underway.\textsuperscript{257}

Bilal Şimşir believes that Turkey's adoption of a Latin based script early that same year strongly influenced those Soviet Turkic groups who had been resisting reform. Şimşir writes that the Crimean and Kazan Tatars had been observing the Turkish Republic closely, and it was because Turkey was still using Arabic that they did not want to give up their shared script. He continues, "It wasn't until after the 1928 alphabet revolution in Turkey that the undecided Soviet Turks had the incentive to make the transition."\textsuperscript{258} He also believes that at this point the acceptance of the

\textsuperscript{254}Stenograficheskii otchet vtorogo plenuma VTsK NTA (Baku, 1929), p. 11, 13, 25, 141, cited in Winner, p. 141. The examples could be found in Azerbaijan's \textit{Yeñi Yol} as early as 1922, in \textit{Yyk Yol} which began to be published in Tiflis in 1924, and in \textit{Türkmenistan} beginning in 1927. See appendix.

\textsuperscript{257}Winner, p. 142. The fact that the meeting was held in Kazan', a former bastion of anti-Latinist sentiment, is symbolic of the "Arabists" defeat.

\textsuperscript{258}Şimşir, p. 116-117.
Latin alphabet was a *fait-accompli* and the 1926 conference had been a show performed to legitimize political objectives.\(^{259}\)

On 7 August 1929 the All-Union Central Executive Committee issued a joint decree with the Council of People's Commissars [*Sovnarkom*], which effectively made the new Latin alphabet compulsory for all nationalities which had previously used the Arabic script. They agreed

1. To oblige all state institutions of the USSR and all organizations of all-Union standing to use the new Turkic alphabet whenever a Turkic language is used, particularly in the publication of laws and decrees of the government of the USSR.
2. To propose (*predlozhit*) to the Central Publishing House of the Peoples of the USSR to cease publishing in the Arabic alphabet and to do all its new publishing and all republishing in the new Turkic alphabet.
3. To suggest that all higher educational institutions...start using the new Turkic alphabet from the beginning of the next academic year.
4. To oblige competent authorities (the Commissariats of Internal and Foreign Trade) to facilitate the import of printing facilities, type-writers, etc., in the new alphabet.
5. To forbid the import of typographical material...in Arabic.\(^{260}\)

The Committee's basic goals had been achieved. As a contemporary recorded, "The tasks which remained, besides the refinement of the original projects, were concerned

\(^{259}\)Şimşir, p. 96-155, *passim*. The fact that the majority of the conference was conducted in Russian and the stenographic record appears only in Russian is worth noting. Even the Russian and foreign scholars, mostly Turkologists, who attended were proficient in Turkic dialects and so the choice must have been a political rather than a linguistic or communicative concern.

with related problems, such as the creation of separate standard orthographies, the
writing of grammars and textbooks for and in the languages of the Turkic peoples, the
creation of new terms in the national languages to correspond to the many new
phenomena of industrialization, etc., and the construction of a unified Turkic
shorthand and of type-writers in the new script. 261

Türkmen Latinization

There is no evidence of intellectual resistance to Latinization in Turkmenistan.
On the contrary, the men who had been working so diligently to create a reformed,
Turkmenified Arabic script joined the ranks of the Latinizers without delay. In 1927,
Geldiew had been elected to the Scientific Soviet which had been founded by the All-
Union New Turkic Alphabet Central Executive Committee. 262 His task (whether
self-imposed or directed is uncertain) was to ensure that the peculiarities of spoken
Turkmen, for example long vowels, would be signified in the creation of the new

261 D. Korkmasov, "Ot alfavita k literaturnomu iasyku," Revolutsiia i
Natsionalnosti, No. 9, 1935, p. 41, cited in Winner, p. 144. The creation of
"separate standard orthographies" is interesting. There is no indication in the
secondary sources as to whether this meant that the committee was concerned about
preserving the dialectical distinctions in an effort to support nationalist interests, out of
linguistic concern, or for some other reason. The matter of separateness continued to
be a noteworthy matter during Cyrillicization.

For a good study of the creation of new terms for national languages see
Kucera, 1952.

The shorthand system was completed by 1931. The manufacturing of NTA
typewriters was worked out by 1937. See Winner, p. 145.

262 Presumably this is part of or the same as the Turkmen New Alphabet Committee
which was also created in 1927 to oversee Latinization in Turkmenistan. Söyegow,
1993, p. 50.
Latin-based Turkmen. Articles began to appear in various newspapers and journals in this new Latin-based script. On 3 January 1928 the Turkmen SSR Central Executive Committee and the People’s Commissariat Soviet decreed officially that Turkmenistan would adopt the new alphabet. The new grammar rules were printed in the 15, 16, 17 May 1928 issues of the newspaper Türkmenistan. Between 1928-1930 Geldiew wrote textbooks to support instruction of this new script. At the same time the State Scientific Council assigned Geldiew, with Böriew as an assistant, the task of creating an orthography to be used with this new script.²⁶³

Geldiew’s, Böriew’s or any other intellectual’s personal thoughts on this abrupt change of course in their work remains unknown. It is known that Geldiew had attended the Turkological Congress in Baku, with four other Turkmen,²⁶⁴ and Professor Täçmyradow writes that he played an active role including delivering a speech. Täçmyradow further explains that the text of this speech remains unknown since, "because it was delivered in Turkmen, it was not entered into the stenographic account,"²⁶⁵ which was published in Russian. There are several places in the stenographic record where it is noted that a presentation was delivered in Turkic, yet the content is not included. There are also some places where it is noted that the speech was delivered in a Turkic dialect and the translation into Russian is provided. There is no explanation for these variances. What is clear is that Turkmen language

²⁶³Sőýegow, 1993, pp. 50-51.

²⁶⁴Bekki E. Berdiev, Byaşım Kylbeşerow (Moscow), Byaşım Perengiew, Şamuradow; Gibad Alparow was also present and spoke.

planners did not waver in their commitment to standardize the literary language, codify orthography and generally advance literacy.²⁶⁶

_new turkic alphabet committee becomes new alphabet committee_

The Committee had completed its basic tasks, the "Alphabet of the October Revolution," the alphabet of Lenin had been concretely instituted.²⁶⁷ In 1929 the name of the NTA Committee was changed to All-Union Central Committee on the New Alphabet and was attached directly to the Central Executive Committee in Moscow (VTsKNA pri VTsIK SSSR). This New Alphabet Committee addressed new terminology and wrote the new history textbooks for national cultures, which had to be written separately for each nationality.²⁶⁸ The Committee's focus was now expanded to peoples beyond the Turks. Latinization became a nationwide endeavor. Individuals began to propose that Russian replace Cyrillic with a Latin-based script.

A variety of sources supported the Latinization of Russian. The linguist N.F. Iakovlev and Commissar of Enlightenment Lunacharskii each wrote articles in support


²⁶⁸Beatrice King, Changing Man: the Educational System of the USSR (New York, 1936), pp. 294-295, cited in Winner, p. 144. Again the issue of separateness arises and lends credence to arguments of western scholars who assert that divide et impera was the Soviets' ultimate goal.
of the shift. Committees formed within Narkompros' advocated Latinization. So did the Communist Academy which "hosted an exhibition devoted to the new alphabet, which showed how under the previous Russificatory regime the Russian alphabet had expanded outward, and how under the new progressive Soviet regime its domain was continually contracting." This flurry of activity suggested that the Latinization of Russian was being seriously considered. The Committee began to expand its activities to Iranian languages, the Hebrew script, Soviet Chinese and Korean cultures, Belorussian, Ukrainian, Armenian and even Finnish. Only Georgian was not discussed as a possible candidate for Latinization. Russian linguist Iakovlev summarized the ideological attraction and exposed the anti-Russian nature of Latinization in 1929,

The Russian alphabet is at the current time not only ideologically alien to socialist construction, but it also serves as the chief obstacle to latinizatsii, both of other national alphabets, (Hebrew, Armenian, Georgian), and of other cyrillic scripts (Belorussian, Ukrainian, the eastern Finns and others."

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260Iakovlev, "Za latinizatsiu, ' Kul'tura i pis'mennost' vostoka, No. 6, 1930; A. Lunacharskii, "Latinizatsiia russkoi pis'mennosti," Krasnaia Gazeta, Nos. 5-6, 6-7 January 1929; "Latinizatsiia russkoi pis'mennosti " Kul'tura i pis'mennost' vostoka, No. 6, 1930, cf. Martin, 1996 and Winner 1952-53.


274Martin, 1996, p 817, citing archival material.
When the New Alphabet Committee met again in 1930 a total of thirty-six nationalities, including non-Turkic groups like Mongols, had adopted the new script. The 16 May 1930 issue of Türkmenistan printed a front-page announcement, "Pave Way for the New Alphabet!" [Taże eLiüpBje jool Berin!]. With the Latin script firmly in place, the next step, and the goal of the 1930s, would be development of literary languages. Most of the individuals who began this work did not complete it. They were caught up in the shifting tides of Soviet political policy and eliminated.

Political Climate Changes, The 1930s

In May 1930 Geldiew was one of the organizers of the First Turkmen Scientific Council. The theme of the conference was literary language and vocabulary building and included an appearance by the chairman of the Türkmen SSR People’s Commissariat, Gałygysyz Atabaew -- an indication of the level of interest at the highest political levels. Geldiew’s paper concerned the standardization of written Türkmen. By this time Türkmenistan had adopted a Latin based script and the alphabet issue had been resolved. However, problems with terminology remained. One suggestion made was that they adopt the dialect used in a popular periodical, such

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as Türkmenistan, which was familiar to the majority of the people.\(^{279}\) Political conditions prevented the intellectuals from making much progress on these issues.

The changing political climate throughout the Soviet Union in the early 1930s took its toll in Turkmenistan too. As occurred elsewhere in the Soviet Union, the authors of the cultural reforms of the 1920s were accused of being nationalists whose chauvinistic goals were detrimental to socialism. Arrests and executions ensued in all the Central Asian Republics.\(^{279}\) In Central Asia there was a specific link between the purges of the early 1930s and work done in the 1920s on national culture. The targeted individuals had been active in supporting the spread of literacy and developing the national culture, and many worked for periodicals or had published extensively in them. In the early 1930s, Abdylhekim Gulmuhammedow, editor of Türkmenistan, assistant editor of the journals Tokmak and Daýhan and delegate to the 1925 First All-Turkmen Congress which established the Turkmen SSR; Kümüşaly Böriew, Turkmen Education Commissar, Director of the Turkmen Cultural Institute, Director of the Turkmen State Publishing House; Berdi Kerbabaew, the author and poet; Geidiew and other well known intellectuals were branded as "bourgeois nationalists" for the work they had accomplished under Soviet auspices not even a

\(^{279}\)Türkmenistan Birinji ylmy konferensiyasiniñ edebi dıl, adalga hem imia dogrusynda çykaran karary (Aşgabat, 1930), cited in Durdyew, pp. 9-10.

\(^{279}\)The Uzbek Prime Minister, Khojaev, and the Uzbek Communist Party Secretary, Ikramov, were both condemned to death for treason in 1938. Paul Henze, "Politics and Alphabets in Inner Asia," Journal of the Royal Central Asia Society Vol. XLIII, January, 1956, Part I, pp. 36.
decade earlier. Their efforts to raise Turkmen culture and support korenizatsiya culminated in their persecution.

There are discrepancies in the records of what actually happened to these individuals. Muhammet Geldiew's obituary claims that he died from "inner pains." Professor Tagangeldi Täçmyradow wrote in his 1989 book about the life of Geldiew that in 1931 he died from a disease of the stomach. However, Professor Myratgeldi Söýegow has written that Geldiew was warned by Böriev about the "threat which loomed over him like a black cloud" and was driven to suicide. It is plausible that Professor Söýegow's information is accurate, although, since it is without footnotes, until he is able to reveal where he obtained that information it can not be corroborated. As noted above, Professor Täçmyradow writes that it was because of Garahanow's published accusations of nationalism and pan-Turkism that Geldiew's works ended up in a closed archival collection (fond).

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281The Tatar Alparow who had worked so closely with Geldiew seems to have avoided physical persecution. A short biography records his date of death as 1936, due to tubercuosis. It also lists his works and achievements, but omits his interaction with Turkmen. G.K. Iakupova, "Gibad Habibullo维奇 Alparov," Sovetskaia Tiurkologia, No. 6, 1978, pp. 93-94.


284Täçmyradow, 1984, p. 32.
attacks were posthumous, they reflect the danger for national intellectuals which already begun to brew in the last years of Geldiew's life.

Whatever the specifics of Geldiew's story, the consequences of the purges were severe and the effects on individual professional and personal reputations were long-lasting. Those who had worked with Geldiew on language issues were branded "bourgeois nationalists" and were punished. Gulmuhammedow took his own life, Kerbabaew was imprisoned, in 1932 Böriew was jailed. Later in 1937-38, the year of Stalin's great purges, more Turkmen leaders were targeted. Gaýgysyz Atabaew, Nadirbaý Aýtakov, Gurban Sähedow, Allaguly Garahanow, the man who had so viciously attacked Geldiew, and others, were stigmatized as "enemies of the people" (halk düşmanı), and as Professor Söýegow explains, "eliminated."

Stalin had long planned the substitution of the old intelligentsia with a new generation of Moscow-loyal 'cadres and specialists' who had been trained as young Communists during the first Five-Year program. Terry Martin explains that in the early 1920s this handling of national cadres involved two processes. "New proletarian national elites would be trained and promoted, while old nationalist elites would be

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co-opted. It would seem that the training of the new elite had been completed and it was time for the old cadres to move (or be moved) aside. Even the deceased had to be silenced. Their reputations were marred, their works labelled anti-Soviet and to this day some remain inaccessible. For example, the issue of terminology had never really been settled and in the posthumous attacks on Geldiew, it was raised again. Geldiew’s desire to rely on existing Turkic vocabulary, even if taken from other dialects or ancient Turkic made him a target for those seeking to discredit ‘nationalists’ which by the period of Latinization had become a dirty word. Staunch Soviets objected to Geldiew’s approach, calling those who used Arabic and Persian words in creating terminology ‘Pan-Islamists and Pan-Arabists.’ They considered those who translated Soviet-international words like ‘proletariat as ḟoksul, or imperialism as ḟurtbasar,’ as opposed to the Russian proletariat and imperialism, to be nationalists. Denouncers built on the work of Garahanow and continued to represent Geldiew’s works as those of a anti-Soviet, national chauvinist, who was trying to separate Turkmen from Russian and the socialist path, and bolster attempts at a unified Turkic literary language. These characterizations trickled down into the later Soviet history books:

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The language Geldiew used in his 1929 articles continues his own pan-Turkist and nationalistic path. He was trying to build a literary language which was shallow, that is, without taking from other languages, without becoming closer to Russian.²⁹⁰

This was despite the fact that by 1929 Geldiew had very much come to support the idea of borrowing words from Russian. At the Third All-Turkmen Congress of Soviets he said.

*We feel that our poor language should fill itself with international words primarily from Russian on account of the closeness of Russian culture.*²⁹¹

The concerns over terminology would persist even as the Latin script came under scrutiny and gave way to Cyrillic.

Terry Martin links the reverse on Latinization with the shifting policies of the "Great Retreat." During this time of re-examination and re-evaluation of policies of the 1920s, an uncertain pall fell over all policies toward nationalities. In the early 1930s Latinization had been called to a halt, but not reversed. Script reform was in limbo while ideology was worked out. By mid-1933 the New Alphabet Committee's journal was no longer published and no more meetings took place. Also in 1933 came the first serious proposal to Cyrillicize a Turkic script, symbolically, perhaps, it was in Tataristan.²⁹²


There was growing dissatisfaction over the translation and implementation of socialist terms from Russian. Moscow was no longer content with non-Russians finding equivalents in their own languages. Local dialects were no longer acceptable carriers for 'Marxist-Leninist' terminology. Semen Diamanshtein vociferously attacked the tenets of korenizatsiya and the lack of use of Russian.

Diamanshtein also attacked the principle of the supremacy of the dialect and, most remarkably, defended the principle of assimilation. It was wrong, he said, to create a literary language for every ethnic group. Some should use the literary language of a larger related nationality...others would adopt Russian....only three months earlier [this sentiment] would have led to a denunciation of great-power chauvinism. And undoubtedly Dimanshtein would have made that denunciation.\textsuperscript{295}

In the mid-thirties discussions about the validity and appropriateness of Latinization continued until the Great Terror and the purges in 1937-38. In late 1937 resolutions were passed to tighten the control on translations from Russian and Russian was made mandatory in all schools. Accusations similar to the ones made against many Turkmen and Uzbek language planners in 1929-30, were now made against all who had attempted to implement the policies of the late 1920s and early 1930s. They were called 'bourgeois nationalists' and accused of sabotage.\textsuperscript{294} The term 'international' began to be used in a more Russian-oriented fashion. Anti-Russian-ness was no longer acceptable and the "alphabet of the Great October [revolution] became an instrument for creating an international proletarian culture."\textsuperscript{295}


\textsuperscript{295} Fierman, 1991, p. 134.
CHAPTER 4

EPILOGUE

Cyrillicization

Alphabet is not truth.
K. A. Böri, Türkmenistan, 5 May 1930, p. 3

Discussions about Cyrillicization had taken place in the 1920s when there was widespread agreement that some type of alphabet reform needed to take place among Turks but nothing serious arose; due to anti-Russian/pro-national tendencies of the era, Cyrillic did not receive much support at that time. For example, in 1922 at the Second Conference of Uzbek Educational Workers, although the Arabic script was currently undergoing serious reform, Latinization was discussed and "received theoretical approval"; Cyrillicization however was met with "the fiercest possible opposition on the part of all delegates."^296 Professor Ye. D. Polivanov, an active participant in alphabet reform in Central Asia, pointed out that due to anti-Russian sentiment "it would have been, to say the least, utopisitic to come forward with a Cyrillic project" at that time.^297 There is little evidence of endorsement of Cyrillic in Turkmenistan in any era.


In 1937, a speech by the secretary of Narkomnats, A. Khatskevich, revealed that Moscow was ready to advance beyond the international Latin script and pursue a more Russian-oriented socialism. He argued that "the creation of new written languages should facilitate international understanding." The Latin script showed certain shortcomings in this respect, particularly in relation to the smaller nationalities, among which the Latin script had a 'harmful and artificial quality', since it separated the smaller nationalities from the 'basic' nationalities of the USSR. He called on the meeting to give this problem 'special and deep study'.

Thus, discussions of abandoning the Latin alphabet in favor of Cyrillic began. Thomas Winner explains that proponents expounded on the attributes of the Cyrillic script including that it had more characters than Latin and so did not require diacritics. Russian was already a compulsory language in schools, and higher education was offered in Russian only, making it the de facto lingua franca of the USSR. Cyrillicization would eliminate the need for learning two scripts and would in fact facilitate learning Russian. And, since old enmities between Russians and non-Russians had been overcome, the idea that Cyrillicization was a method of Russification would not be an issue. Cyrillic would become the alphabet of the amalgamated Soviet peoples. An article in Pravda summarized,

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298"International" referred not to world-wide understanding but among the Soviet peoples. It had been long used to refer to Socialist activities.

299"VII Plenum VT'sKNTA," Revolutsiia i Natsional'nosteii, No. 3, March 1937, pp. 63, 66, cited in Winner, p. 145. Although NTA is written here, Winner has explained that by this time it was NA, and so this footnote remains a bit unclear.
the transition to the Russian script will contribute to an even greater unification of the peoples of the USSR.\textsuperscript{300}

Turkmenistan, along with almost all other Soviet peoples had adopted a Cyrillic alphabet by 1940; Georgia and Armenia retained their respective traditional scripts, while the Baltic and Karelian peoples continued to use Latin. The Turkic writing systems are essentially the Russian alphabet with a few symbols to represent specifically Turkic sounds. One author describes the atmosphere of the "second 'Alphabet Revolution',"

The groundwork had been laid for it during 1937-38 [purges]. The relatively free debate and the controversies over fine points of phonetics and vocabulary which had made the Latinization campaign lively and interesting were largely absent form the 'Cyrillic Revolution'. The Great Purges had barely ceased. The atmosphere was tense. The non-Russian nationalities...were now clearly confronted with the prospect of inevitable submission to increased Russification.\textsuperscript{301}

Soviet Turcologist Nikolai Baskakov alludes to the Soviet goal of amalgamation of peoples in his reference to extra-code factors in Soviet Cyrillicization. He wrote that the Turkmen reformed Arabic script was replaced with a Latin-based script "not only because it could not meet the necessary scope in developing the Turkmen literary language, but also it was a hindrance in establishing

\textsuperscript{300}A. Grigoryan, "Na novyi alfavit," Pravda, 21 July 1939, p. 4, cited in Winner, p. 146. It is interesting to note that proponents claimed that Cyrillicization was not a method of Russification, but they usually referred to it as the "Russian alphabet" not a 'Soviet' one.

\textsuperscript{301}Henze, 1956, p. 36. Henze apparently views Latinization as the first revolution, disregarding the preceding period of reformed Arabic scripts. I would argue that the period of reformed Arabic scripts was the first "revolution."
the necessary ties to the Russian people and Russian language. Therefore, in 1940 a new alphabet based on the Russian script was adopted.”

There was no Unified Turkic Cyrillic Script. Each of the Turkic groups adopted an individualized Cyrillic alphabet modified to reflect the particulars of that dialect. To further individualize these scripts, sounds found in more than one dialect were often signified by different phonemes and the Turkic alphabets were compiled in slightly different orders. The alphabet began A, B, V, G in Turkmen with Ā as the thirty-sixth letter, although it is the eighth in Azerbaijani Turkish. Tatar begins A, Ā, O, Ö while Kazakh starts out with A, Ā, B, V. It is unclear why the Cyrillic alphabet reformers varied the scripts in this way. It may have been to support distinct national identities, it may have been to reflect the most minute dialectical differences, or it may have been an aspect of ‘divide et impera’ as has been suggested by Western scholars. However, there is no lack of comment on why it was beneficial, even imperative, that the non-Russians adopt a Cyrillic script and few denied that the most important result would be the facilitation of Russian language learning. A 1938 editorial clarified the new position of Russian.

The great and mighty Russian language, the language of Lenin and Stalin, Pushkin and Gorky, Tolstoi and Belyskii, is profoundly dear to all citizens of the USSR, and is studied with love by children and adults...[which shows] the exclusive interest of all nationalities to the study of the language of the great


303 See, Allworth, Bruchis, Paksoy, Wurm.
Russian people, first among equals in the fraternal family of the peoples of the USSR.  

The New Alphabet Committee was disbanded in December 1937, and by April 1939 thirty-five languages had shifted to Cyrillic-based alphabets. The process aimed to unify the new alphabets as closely with Russian as linguistically possible. Use of Cyrillic by almost all Soviet peoples would go far in symbolically supporting the merging (slitianie) of all the Soviet peoples into one cohesive Soviet man (sovietskii chelovek).  

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CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

We used to be a people who had an (independent) state. Where is our own state now? For whose benefit are we conquering these lands?...We used to be a people who had its own kagan. Where is our own kagan now? To which kagan are we giving our services?

Kül Tegin inscriptions, early 8th century

The history of Turkmen corpus planning demonstrates how identity issues and politics influenced language planning and nation building. As with all modern nations, a Turkmen "nation" emerged only after the national elements were codified and taught to the people. The Soviet republics were each assigned the manifestly nationalistic emblems such as flag and seal, but culture elements, even apart from language and script, were equally important in signifying republican cultures. For example, the poet Navoi was an important Turkic poet who wrote in Chagatay, which had been read widely throughout Central Asia, but during the Soviet period his works were recognized as Uzbek literary tradition. His works were omitted from the Turkmen literary canon just as certain dastans were limited to regional recognition rather than as part of the shared culture that they were. Eric Hobsbawm calls this "inventing tradition," that is ideas or events such as clothing styles, language, literature, holidays, state rituals "actually invented, constructed and formally

instituted..."306 or previously existing cultural elements imbued with new significance.309

Traditions are the building blocks of nationalism when practices, values and norms are created or manipulated specifically to engender nationalistic sentiment. Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's accomplishments in the Turkish Republic are superb examples of nation building via the invention of tradition and symbols, such as the Latin-based Turkish alphabet. Shifts in Turkmen national identity were likewise reflected in alphabet and script modifications. For example, the reformed Turkmen Arabic script embodied an expressive measure of Turkmen national efforts toward cultural autonomy, while the Cyrillic script symbolized Turkmenistan's incontestable membership in the Soviet Union. The components of Turkmen orthographic reform -- the various stages of the alphabets, the lives of the men who worked on script reform, the creation and dissolution of the congresses, commissions and committees created to foster progress and reform -- reflect the stages of Turkmen national identity building through the processes of language policy.


There was no paucity of Turkmen identity affiliations even before Imperial Russia invaded Turkmen regions in the late nineteenth century. However, it was in part due to this invasion and subsequent Soviet overlordship that Turkmen began to discuss their identity among themselves and with other Turkic groups in modern, nationalistic terms. The desire to 'Turkify' was most strongly influenced by fellow Turks, especially the Tatars who were leading the modernization efforts with their Jadidism.\textsuperscript{310} This orientation was not dependent upon Russian presence or interference, but was altered by the Russian influence, especially during the Soviet period when Central Asians were divided into political, territory-based national groups. Their stable, if not strictly defined, sense of identity had been de-centered by the Russian presence.\textsuperscript{311} It was further influenced by the Soviet system. The Turkmen quickly went from viewing themselves as tribes culturally connected by their historic lineage to a nation in the modern sense.

\textsuperscript{310}The question of whether modernization necessarily equals westernization depends on which Turkic group is being examined. The Tatars' and the Azerbajiani Turks' modernization efforts were western oriented, while the Central Asian Turks were more focused on Turkification. Adeeb Khalid, 1998, discusses other nuances between the Tatar Jadidists and Uzbek, Kirgiz and Kazak Jadidists.


The Turkmen primary signifier was changed from tribal to national when the "Other" became prominent, although at the beginning of the twentieth century the Central Asian Turks had been debating amongst themselves who they would eventually consider to be the "Other" linguistically, ethnically and culturally and who they would view as part of themselves (i.e. Do Turkmen and Uzbek speak Turkic dialects or different languages - which implies that each people is deserving of individual political recognition?).
The histories of alphabet reform illustrate that communities reveal themselves not only in the substance of what they write, but in the methods they use to write it. The depiction of language is as important as the language itself. As the carrier of culture script communicates at least one aspect of the identity a society wishes to affirm. For this reason we can look to script and language history to trace the evolution of and manifestations of a society's self-identification.

Language and alphabet reforms indicate a society's growth and often its repositioning of Self with respect to its Others -- neighbors, allies, enemies, or the world. As societies evolve and encounter new experiences, augmentations to alphabets or shifts in script mirror a society's sense of alterations in its identity, be they religious or political in nature, or an aspect of broader social advancements, as in modernization campaigns. For example, Latinization efforts were in accord with the cultural concerns more generally throughout the Soviet Union, which emphasized the standardization of written languages and the eradication of illiteracy as a means of

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313In 1710 Peter the Great himself took part in creating a "civil Russian alphabet" from the Old Slavonic alphabet. The old alphabet was relegated to ecclesiastical works, but all other texts employed the new secular alphabet. Nicholas Riasanovsky, A History of Russia (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 318. In 1928 Atatürk supplanted the Arabic script with a Latin-based one in the new Turkish Republic, see Heyd, 1954. Robert Young, "Written Navajo: A Brief History," Advances in the Creation and Revision of Writing Systems, 1977, pp. 459-470.
inculcating Soviet values.34 However, such practical considerations did not diminish the importance of symbolism or the politics of culture.

Politicization of language and script stems from ideological shifts both from within, such as modernization efforts or nation building, and from without, such as the spread of Arabic script with Islam or Cyrillic in the Soviet Union. This mingling of culture and politics leads to the predominance of extra-code factors in language development. For example, innovations to the sixteenth-century Swedish script were made not to reflect differences between spoken Swedish and Danish, but to symbolize Sweden’s secession from Scandinavia.35 In the Soviet Union too the numerous script and language reforms stemmed from ideological shifts and re-orientation of Self to Other. Since Self and Other are constantly evolving, re-evaluation of script symbolism took place several times. When the Turks first conceived of Turkifying the Arabic script in the late nineteenth century, Arabic was the linguistic Other and Self was Turkic. During Latinization in the late 1920s-early 1930s, the Turkic Self was mutating into a less Muslim, more Soviet, Moscow-defined ‘modern’ society. Russia had been the political Other, but with Central Asia’s repositioning toward


Moscow, Soviet Turks were obliged to turn away from Islam and Turkey. The history of script reform in Central Asia mirrors these changes in Self and Other and the political nature of language policy. As Terry Martin succinctly explains, "alphabet politics took on such significance because its highly symbolic content made it into a uniquely sensitive ideological barometer for monitoring the state of the Soviet nationalities policy."\textsuperscript{316}

Script codification was a defining aspect of post-1917 Turkic identity formation. Political extra-code factors dominated almost all the preferences in developing Turkic writing systems as nationalism and Sovietism politicized both similarities and differences between the Turkic dialects. A distinctive Turkmen writing system would have assisted in differentiating the Turkmen from other Turks. Conversely, by sharing the writing system of other Turkic scripts, the Turkmen would have taken a step toward designating themselves culturally and politically as "Turks" rather than as "Turkmen." Neither was ever fully implemented as the political winds shifted from support for development of reformed-Arabic scripts in each Turkic region to a push for Latinization, and later Cyrillicization. As dictated by Soviet officials and Party leaders, local identity either as "Turk" or "Turkmen" had to be subsumed under an all-embracing Soviet identity. The Soviet Turks' brief period of cultural self-determination ended by the late 1920s. However, successive script and alphabet reforms confirm the enduring importance of script symbolism in the Soviet Union. It is not accidental that when independence came again in 1991 many of the same issues

\textsuperscript{316}Martin, 1996, pp. 790-791.
were picked up by the Turkic Central Asians and the question of how similarities between their writing systems would affect their autonomy was one of them. 

APPENDIX A

Yeşil Yol, 21 September 1922, p. 1
APPENDIX B

Yeşil Yol, p.2
The New Turkic Alphabet on the last page of the same issue of Yəfə Yol.
APPENDIX C

Unified Turkic Alphabet, 1927
When the Soviet Turks transitioned to a Latin-based script, a different alphabet was designed for each group. In order to promote Turkic alphabet unity, the Central Turkic Alphabet Committee, founded in Baku in 1926, undertook creating a single alphabet for all Soviet Turks. The above shown "Unified Turkic Alphabet" was prepared in 1927. From Şimşir, 1991, p. 41.
APPENDIX D

New (Jani) Turkmen Alphabet, 1927
The "New Turkmen Alphabet" from the newspaper *Turkmenistan*, No. 175, 1927, p. 5. The small section of the paper would become the "Teze Eliipbijı Belimi" [New Alphabet Section].
APPENDIX E

Türkmenistan, No. 11, 1928
The Turkmen Latin alphabet from the newspaper "Türkmenistan", No. 11, 1928, p. 135

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Notes:
- This table represents the Turkmen Latin alphabet.
- Each letter is paired with its phonetic equivalent.

Additional Information:
- The table includes both Cyrillic and Latin scripts.
- The Latin script is used in the Turkmen Republic for writing Turkmen.
APPENDIX F

Geldew's publications
Title page of Muhammet Geldiew's primer


Title page of Muhammet Geldiew and Kumuşaly Böriew,

APPENDIX G

Potseluevskii's Turkmen primers
Руководство для изучения туркменского языка

Под редакцией К. А. Борфева.

Туркменское государственное издательство.
A.H. XABAD. 1929 г.

Title page, in both Russian and Turkmen, of A. P. Potselyevskii, Primer for Studying the Turkmen Language, K. A. Bööri oğlu [Bööriew], trans., (Aşgabat: Turkmenistan State Publishing House, 1929). At the end there is a short Turkmen-Russian dictionary.
APPENDIX H

Current Latin-based Turkmen alphabet
The 1993 Latin-based Turkmen alphabet shown as printed, handwritten, pronunciation. Taken from Myradgeldi Söyegow and Nyrązberdi Rejewow, Türkçe Türkmen Elipbiyi (Așgabat: Ruh, 1995), p. 34.
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