

**The Road to Turkish Language Reform
and the Rise of Turkish Nationalism**

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the concurrent changes in Turkish identity and in the Turkish language from the early developments in the period of the modernizing *Tanzimat* reforms to the Anatolian Turkish nationalism and the alphabet and language reform of the Republican era. It looks specifically at how language issues played a large role in the development of Turkish national identity towards the end of the Ottoman period, and also examines the development of Ottomanism and Islamism. Finally it looks at how the desire to promote secular Turkish nationalism in place of the old Ottoman-Islamic identity was the driving force behind the Kemalist script and language reforms and discusses some of the consequences of these planned changes to the Turkish language and to the basis of Turkish identity.

RÉSUMÉ

Ce mémoire traite des changements qui ont eu lieu en même temps dans l'identité turque et dans la langue turque à partir de la période de réforme et de modernisation du *Tanzimat* jusqu'au nationalisme turc anatolien et à la réforme de l'alphabet et de la langue dans la période républicaine. Ce travail étudie spécifiquement le grand rôle que le thème du langage a joué dans le développement de l'identité nationale turque vers la fin de la période ottomane, et aussi s'occupe du développement de l'ottomanisme et de l'Islamisme. Finalement, on examine comment le désir de propager le nationalisme turc laïc en place de l'ancienne identité ottomane-Islamique a motivé les réformes kémalistes de l'alphabet et de la langue, et on termine avec une discussion de quelques conséquences de ces changements planifiés par rapport à la langue et à la base de l'identité turque.

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INTRODUCTION

Ottomanism, Pan-Islamism and Pan-Turkism were all doctrines intended to save the Ottoman Empire, to halt its fragmentation. They represented different ideas as to what the basis of loyalty should be for the subjects (eventually citizens) of the empire. The changing realities of the time, as the empire continued to lose territory and the Ottoman Turks found themselves more and more in the majority in the territory that remained under Ottoman control, eventually led to an increased emphasis on Turkism and finally to Turkish nationalism based on the territory that remained in Anatolia and Thrace. At the same time, the older Ottoman-Islamic identity never completely disappeared, despite the Kemalist program of Turkification, secularization and Westernization.

Closely linked with the story of the development of Turkish nationalism is the story of Turkish language reform, all of which is also tied up with the rapid growth of Turkish publishing activity in the last century of the empire. According to Geoffrey Lewis,

The spirit of the Tanzimat... gave rise to the first serious stirrings of Turkish nationalism and to a flowering of journalism, and from then on the tide of language reform flowed strongly.¹

This increase in publishing activity provided a new forum for the spread of political ideas,

¹ Geoffrey Lewis, *The Turkish Language Reform: A Catastrophic Success* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 12.

and at the same time provided an impetus for the simplification of Ottoman Turkish that would allow writers and publishers to reach a larger audience. The growing amount of reading material in Turkish also helped, by its mere presence and circulation, to bring about a greater awareness of Turkish identity among its readers.

Many of the major figures in the history of Turkish nationalism are also major figures in the history of Turkish language reform, which makes sense since language is often a major ingredient in national identity. As Bernard Lewis writes,

For the first signs of a Turkish national consciousness among the Ottoman Muslims we must turn to the intellectual life of the nineteenth century, and especially to the writers on history and language.²

There are a number of books that deal with Turkish language reform or with Turkish nationalism, but there are only a few that treat Turkish language reform and Turkish nationalism together in any detail. In fact, some of the connections made by these authors are rather loosely built. *The Development of Secularism in Turkey* by Niyazi Berkes³ and *The Emergence of Modern Turkey* by Bernard Lewis both include long and very useful sections on nineteenth-century Ottoman intellectual history, including much on language and the early inklings of Turkish nationalism. David Kushner's *The Rise of Turkish Nationalism 1876-1908*⁴ and Masami Arai's *Turkish Nationalism in the Young Turk Era*⁵ each provide a good amount of detail on the discussions going on in the newspapers and journals over shorter periods, and both books include much on the language issue. Ağâh

² Bernard Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey*, 3rd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 347.

³ Niyazi Berkes, *The Development of Secularism in Turkey* (New York: Routledge, 1998).

⁴ David Kushner, *The Rise of Turkish Nationalism 1876-1908* (London: Frank Cass, 1977).

⁵ Masami Arai, *Turkish Nationalism in the Young Turk Era* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1992).

Sırrı Levend's *Türk Dilinde Gelişme ve Sadeleşme Evreleri* (The Stages of Development and Simplification in the Turkish Language)⁶ consists mostly of passages that illustrate both the changes that the Turkish language has undergone over time and the debates on the issue up until the actual reforms of the Turkish Republic. For an overview of the reforms in the Turkish Republic, Uriel Heyd's *Language Reform in Modern Turkey*⁷ has been largely surpassed by Geoffrey Lewis' *The Turkish Language Reform: A Catastrophic Success*, which goes into much more detail and is much more up-to-date. The book's main shortcoming is that Geoffrey Lewis shies away from dealing with the politics behind the reforms. Finally, Bilâl Şimşir's *Türk Yazı Devrimi* (The Turkish Alphabet Revolution)⁸ provides a detailed account of the switch to the Latin alphabet with copious background information.

What follows is an examination of the origins of Turkish nationalism and Turkish language reform, and of the concurrent transformation of the Turkish-speaking Muslim subjects of the Ottoman sultan into citizens of the Turkish Republic and of the language of the Ottoman court into the national language of the Turkish Republic. In looking at the stages in these transformations, every effort has been made to give adequate background information on the historical and political situation at the time. Early developments are not included merely as a "pre-history" of the Turkish Republic and the Kemalist reforms. However, much of what happened before the Republican period can help explain the issues that still face Turkey today, as there is in fact much more continuity between the

⁶ Ağâh Sırrı Levend, *Türk Dilinde Gelişme ve Sadeleşme Evreleri*, 3rd ed. (Ankara: Türk Dil Kurumu Yayınları, 1972).

⁷ Uriel Heyd, *Language Reform in Modern Turkey* (Jerusalem: Israeli Oriental Society, 1954).

⁸ Bilâl N. Şimşir, *Türk Yazı Devrimi* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, 1992).

Ottoman state and the Turkish Republic than some Kemalists might want to admit.

Chapter one gives background information on the Ottoman Turkish language and looks at developments up to the first constitutional period (1876-1878), including the *Tanzimat* reforms, the influence of western-style nationalism, the doctrine of Ottomanism, the spread of modern publishing activities, the Young Ottomans, and early efforts to reform the Arabic script.

Chapter two covers the Hamidian period (1876-1908) including the 1876 constitution, the official emphasis on Islamism, the continuation of reform, official censorship, the rise of exile opposition groups, the growing interest in the Turkish language issue, and the development of Turkism.

Chapter three deals with developments during the second constitutional (Young Turk) period (1908-1918), including Turkism and Pan-Turkism, the emergence of Turkish nationalism, the *Yeni Lisan* (New Language) movement, Ziya Gökalp's ideas on language and nationalism, and ongoing efforts to reform the Arabic script.

Chapter four examines the early reforms of the Turkish Republic and the new territorially-defined Turkish nationalism. The 1928 "alphabet revolution" is discussed in detail, and Kemalist efforts to impose the use of Turkish in worship are also examined, as is the work of the Turkish Historical Society.

Chapter five deals with the Turkish Linguistic Society and the later reform that purged the

Turkish language of much of its Arabic and Persian vocabulary, paying special attention to the politics behind the reform, particularly the more militant secularism of the 1930s. The Sun-Language Theory is also discussed.

Chapter six then looks briefly at later developments involving Turkish nationalism and the Turkish language, including Ottoman-Islamic continuity in the Republic, Turkish identity issues and the resurgence of Islamic identity, racist Turkish nationalism, and the continuing consequences of the language reform.

The Kemalists engineered radical changes to both the Turkish language and to the basis of Turkish identity, and these developments stand in sharp contrast with the earlier, more natural developments in the late Ottoman period. While efforts have been made to illustrate both the positive and negative aspects of these changes, in the end any real judgment on these issues is left to the people who are living with their consequences.

CHAPTER ONE

THE *TANZİMAT* AND THE YOUNG OTTOMANS

The *Tanzimat* and Ottomanism

It was during the reign of Mahmut II (1808-1839) that the idea of an Ottoman state began to emerge, “composed of peoples of diverse nationalities and religions, based on secular principles of sovereignty as contrasted with the medieval concept of an Islamic empire.”⁹ It was also during his reign that the twin problems of foreign intervention and nationalism among the *millet*s really began to emerge.

The *millet* system began to emerge in international diplomacy as an inviolate system that was no longer a unilateral grant of status and privileges to the non-Muslim communities; they were seen as having acquired rights as *nationalities* guaranteed by the protection of the Christian powers of Europe.¹⁰

The doctrine of Ottomanism (*Osmanlılık*) which began to emerge during the reign of Mahmut II stressed the equality of all Ottoman subjects in an attempt to undermine the

⁹ Berkes, *Development of Secularism in Turkey*, 90.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 96. At this point the word *millet* referred to a non-Muslim community in the Ottoman Empire, for example, the Greek Orthodox community. Later the word took on its modern meaning of “nation.”

various national movements that threatened the empire.¹¹ As for external threats, Akif Efendi (later Paşa, 1787-1845) would write a memorandum in 1822 examining different ways the empire could address the threats facing it, particularly from Russia. The first option he gave was defense of the empire through Holy War; the second was “slavery,” or coming under colonial rule; while the third was withdrawal to Anatolia.¹²

The *Tanzimat* (literally “re-orderings”) officially began on November 3, 1839 with the promulgation of the *Tanzimat* Charter, the *Hatt-ı Şerif* (Noble Rescript) of Gülhane, just a few months after Mahmut died and was succeeded by his son Abdülmecit I (1839-1861). Ottomanism “found its most formal expression” in the *Hatt-ı Şerif*, which granted equality under the law to all persons regardless of religion.¹³ This represented a “radical breach with ancient Islamic tradition,” and many Muslims could not easily accept the idea that the infidel Ottoman subjects were their equals.¹⁴ Still, it was hoped that such guarantees “would strengthen the independence and integrity of the Ottoman Empire by increasing the loyalty of its subjects, Christian as well as Muslim, and by diminishing separatist tendencies.”¹⁵ This trend was continued with the *Hatt-ı Hümayun* (Imperial Rescript) of February 18, 1856, which reaffirmed the *Tanzimat* Charter and went even further in granting equality regardless of religion. What’s more, it did so in a language and tone which were “more modern and western, to the point of clarity and conciseness

¹¹ Roderic Davison, “Nationalism as an Ottoman Problem and the Ottoman Response,” in *Nationalism in a Non-National State: The Dissolution of the Ottoman Empire*, ed. William W. Haddad and William Ochsenwald (Columbus, Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1977), 39-40.

¹² B. Lewis, *Emergence of Modern Turkey*, 325.

¹³ Davison, “Nationalism as an Ottoman Problem,” 39.

¹⁴ B. Lewis, *Emergence of Modern Turkey*, 107.

¹⁵ Roderic H. Davison, *Reform in the Ottoman Empire 1856-1876* (New York: Gordian Press, 1973), 40-1.

unusual for Ottoman documents of those days.”¹⁶ An 1855 decree had stated that official documents would now be written in a simpler Ottoman Turkish, and the effects of this decree could be seen in the simpler style of the 1856 *Hatt-ı Hümayun*.¹⁷

The provisions of the *Hatt-ı Hümayun* “were mostly directed to the non-Muslim *millets* and aimed at ending their desire for autonomy or independence.”¹⁸ Prior to the *Tanzimat*, the *millets* had been “little theocracies within an empire,” each under its own spiritual leader.¹⁹ With the *Hatt-ı Hümayun* of 1856, they “underwent secularizing constitutional changes” and became “little non-territorial republics and incipient ‘nations.’”²⁰ At the same time, the demographic situation was made even more complicated by the number, diversity and geographic distribution of the various nationalities in the Ottoman Empire. They had gone through centuries of racial mixing, and the various “religious combinations, syncretisms of all kinds, and different varieties of crypto-Muslims” didn’t simplify matters.²¹ The Ottoman Empire was in effect “a body politic entirely made up of ethnic minorities.”²²

On top of this, as Andrew Mango points out, “Script and religion went together: Turkish-speaking Greeks wrote Turkish in Greek characters, Armenians and Jews in their own

¹⁶ Ibid., 55.

¹⁷ Stanford J. Shaw and Ezel Kural Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey*, vol. 2, *Reform, Revolution, and Republic: The Rise of Modern Turkey, 1808-1975* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 129.

¹⁸ Ibid., 125.

¹⁹ Berkes, *Development of Secularism in Turkey*, 158.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Davison, “Nationalism as an Ottoman Problem,” 30-5.

²² Ibid., 46.

alphabet.”²³ Since identity at the time was based primarily on religious affiliation, what this means is that, for example, Turcophone Greek Orthodox Christians wrote Turkish in the Greek alphabet since that was the alphabet of their religion. Many Greeks and Armenians, meaning Greek Orthodox Christians and Armenian Gregorian Apostolic Christians, spoke only Turkish while there were “Turks” who spoke only Greek, for example in Crete. Roderic Davison gives an example of a man from Ankara who was traveling in Austria around the middle of the nineteenth century. When asked his nationality, he insisted that he was a Catholic and only a Catholic, failing to mention that he was an Ottoman subject or that he was Armenian.²⁴

With the spread of western-style nationalism based on language and ethnicity in the middle of the nineteenth century, the Christian minority groups began placing more emphasis on their respective vernacular languages.²⁵ For instance, Izmir-born Adamantios Korais (1748-1833) worked at creating a new literary language through a combination of vernacular and classical Greek, and “his edition of the Greek classics served as the literary-linguistic foundation of Greek nationalism.”²⁶ In the 1840s, a growing Armenian press began to use the vernacular in place of the old church language, gradually bringing written Armenian closer to the spoken language.²⁷ Kemal Karpat points out that for the Serbs and the Bulgarians, religion was only of secondary importance in the formation of national identity. Instead, “language, ethnic culture, and the memory of their historical

²³ Andrew Mango, *Atatürk* (London: John Murray, 1999), 464.

²⁴ Davison, “Nationalism as an Ottoman Problem,” 32, 34.

²⁵ Davison, *Reform in the Ottoman Empire*, 62.

²⁶ Kemal H. Karpat, *An Inquiry into the Social Foundations of Nationalism in the Ottoman State: From Social Estates to Classes, from Millet to Nations* (Princeton, New Jersey: Center of International Studies, 1973), 75.

²⁷ Davison, *Reform in the Ottoman Empire*, 121.

states prior to the Turkish conquest in the fourteenth century served as the fountainhead of national identity.”²⁸

It was with the aim of fostering political unity that the men of the *Tanzimat* began referring to the language as Ottoman (*Osmanlıca* or *lisan-ı Osmani*, as opposed to *kaba Türkçe*, the “coarse Turkish” of the common people), and to the state as *Millet-i Osmaniye*.²⁹ Facing nationalist agitation in the 1860s, official Ottoman documents continued to refer to groups within the empire by religious affiliation, avoiding even the mention of the concept of nationalism or of designations such as “Greek” or “Romanian.” “Ottoman policy could not, any more than could Austro-Hungarian policy, afford to admit such a thing as a principle of nationality or of national self-determination.”³⁰

In 1869, new laws on nationality were introduced. The first of these laws “substituted modern political definitions of nationality and naturalization for the old criterion of conversion to Islam.”³¹ Everyone living in Ottoman territory would now be considered an Ottoman subject barring proof to the contrary, and Ottoman subjects were henceforth required to obtain official permission before becoming a citizen of another state. This was aimed at curbing the practice where Ottoman Christians gained special privileges by adopting foreign nationality.³²

²⁸ Karpat, *Social Foundations of Nationalism*, 82.

²⁹ Levend, *Türk Dilinde Gelişme*, 11; Davison, *Reform in the Ottoman Empire*, 62-3.

³⁰ Davison, “Nationalism as an Ottoman Problem,” 51.

³¹ Davison, *Reform in the Ottoman Empire*, 262-3.

³² *Ibid.*, 263.

The *Tanzimat* Reforms, Western Influences and Modernization

There was growing contact with the West at this time, and more people were beginning to learn European languages. An important development in the intellectual history of the Ottoman Empire was the establishment of the *Tercüme Odası* (Translation Bureau) by Mahmut II. The Translation Bureau was founded to translate government correspondence, both “external and intercommunal,” but it gradually evolved into “a college of foreign languages... [where] future Turkish intellectuals got their start.”³³ Westerners were also employed, including the English Orientalist Redhouse, and the young Ottoman bureaucrats who worked there were exposed not only to western languages (primarily French), but also to western ideas.³⁴ At the same time, Şerif Mardin notes that “with the increased number of foreign experts employed by the Porte in the 1840’s and 1850’s, Western popular as well as serious literature became more widely available in the Ottoman Empire.”³⁵

Important reforms that were implemented during the *Tanzimat* period include the establishment of secular criminal tribunals in 1847, the promulgation of a secular commercial code in 1850, and an Ottoman Bank established in 1856. But a particularly important area of reform was education. New eight-year *rüşdiye* (adolescence) schools were opened beginning in 1838, and provided a modern secular secondary education to young men who chose not to pursue a career as a traditional religious scholar. In 1845 a commission was formed with the task of revamping the entire educational system, and the

³³ Berkes, *Development of Secularism in Turkey*, 128.

³⁴ Davison, *Reform in the Ottoman Empire*, 29.

³⁵ Şerif Mardin, *The Genesis of Young Ottoman Thought: A Study in the Modernization of Turkish Political Ideas* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1962), 194-5.

Ottoman Ministry of Education was then created in 1847.³⁶ Between 1845 and 1868 “education was almost completely secularized,” and 1868 saw the opening of a new French-style *lycée* (the Galatasaray *lycée* in Beyoğlu) where the language of instruction was French.³⁷ Plans were made for an Ottoman university, the *Darülfünun* (House of Sciences), which opened briefly in 1870-1871 and again in 1874-1881 but was not “definitively” opened until 1900.³⁸

For an Ottoman bureaucrat in the middle of the nineteenth century, education basically meant the ability to read and write, and “reading and writing were no mean achievements, considering the difficulty of the language and the calligraphic system, and especially the complexity of the official style, which was loaded with Arabic and Persian terminology and often sought elegance of expression at the expense of clarity.”³⁹ After learning how to read and write in primary school (and from the 1840s on, in one of the few secondary *rüşdiye* schools), a boy would be employed as a *kâtip* (secretary) in a government office and complete his education on the job. In 1838, a school (the *Mekteb-i Maarif-i Adliye*, or School for Secular Learning) was founded with the specific purpose of training bureaucrats for government employment.⁴⁰

In 1850, the *Encümen-i Daniş* (Council of Knowledge) was founded to help pave the way for an Ottoman university. Although the preparation of textbooks was meant to be one of

³⁶ Ibid., 163, 225; Shaw and Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire*, 47, 107.

³⁷ Mardin, *Genesis of Young Ottoman Thought*, 163.

³⁸ Shaw and Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire*, 110.

³⁹ Davison, *Reform in the Ottoman Empire*, 32-3.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 33, 45.

its main purposes, all that actually emerged from this effort was a handful of books.⁴¹ Still, it is also significant that the *Encümen-i Daniş* had been intended to work towards “the simplification of the Ottoman language and the spreading of knowledge.”⁴² One project it discussed was an Ottoman dictionary which would limit the number of foreign words, particularly Arabic and Persian words, that would be “accepted for common usage.”⁴³ According to Şerif Mardin, “The new approach to language indicated that the general reader and the man in the street were beginning to be given an importance which they had not been able to acquire in the eyes of the intellectuals of a bygone social order.”⁴⁴

While Arabic had been the language of traditional *medrese* (religious school) learning, Ottoman Turkish was now gaining ground as the language of secular education in the new *Tanzimat* schools.⁴⁵ As early as 1845, the commission working on the new secular education system “recommended elimination of many Arabic and Persian words and expressions and their replacement with Turkish counterparts.”⁴⁶

The new *Tanzimat* educational system also led to the creation of a new elite which “adopted European tastes in dress and in social intercourse, in literature and in thought.”⁴⁷ This new elite soon developed a sense of group identity, became “the bearers of public

⁴¹ Ibid., 45.

⁴² Mardin, *Genesis of Young Ottoman Thought*, 226.

⁴³ Davison, *Reform in the Ottoman Empire*, 177.

⁴⁴ Mardin, *Genesis of Young Ottoman Thought*, 227.

⁴⁵ Berkes, *Development of Secularism in Turkey*, 192-3.

⁴⁶ Shaw and Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire*, 129.

⁴⁷ Dankwart A. Rustow, “The Modernization of Turkey in Historical and Comparative Perspective,” in *Social Change and Politics in Turkey: A Structural-Historical Analysis*, ed. Kemal H. Karpat (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1973), 100.

opinion,” and “proceeded to form political associations to give expression to such opinions.”⁴⁸ There was a great deal of interdependence between political and literary life, where the major writers were also at the forefront in the “movement of ideas.”⁴⁹ In the end, the establishment of the new educational system was an extremely important development, since Turkey’s future leaders would receive their educations in the schools founded during the *Tanzimat*.⁵⁰

In addition to these advances in education, the *Tanzimat* also witnessed other developments in culture and communications. Western influence can be seen in many of the cultural and technological innovations of this period. For example, the first western-style theaters appeared beginning in 1839, and the Italian influence can be seen in the word *tiyatro*.⁵¹ At the same time, French was making inroads among the educated elite.

The possible invasion of French as a medium of teaching, and as a vehicle for expressing new ideas and ideals provided the stimulus for an awakened interest in a modern Ottoman and for identifying it with the Turkish language itself.⁵²

The telegraph was introduced into the Ottoman Empire during the Crimean War (1853-1856), and would play an important role in years to come. “Messages at first were sent in both French and Ottoman, with the latter transcribed into Latin letters until an Ottoman script machine was invented (with 428 characters) for the task.”⁵³ Şerif Mardin writes that

the general increase in communications exerted a driving force in the direction of language reform. Thus the first time the practice of teaching

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Alessio Bombaci, *Storia della Letteratura Turca* (Milan: Nuova Accademia Editrice, 1956), 422.

⁵⁰ Rustow, “Modernization of Turkey,” 108-9.

⁵¹ Bombaci, *Letteratura Turca*, 422.

⁵² Berkes, *Development of Secularism in Turkey*, 194.

⁵³ Shaw and Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire*, 120.

Turkish by using Arabic grammars was abandoned was in 1846. In that year a professor at the Imperial Military College had to compose a Turkish grammar because military science did not lend itself to the use of the intricate and overloaded Ottoman of the time.⁵⁴

The complexity of the Ottoman language of this period, loaded down as it was with Arabic and Persian vocabulary and constructions, soon became an obstacle to modern communications.

The Ottoman Turkish Language

A thousand years ago “most of the ancestors of the present Turks of Turkey had become Muslim,” and their use of Persian terms for such basic religious concepts as “prophet” (*peygamber*) indicates that they were introduced to Islam by “peoples of Iranian speech.”⁵⁵ In the centuries that followed, large amounts of vocabulary were borrowed from both Persian and Arabic, though the influx of Arabic words was the larger of the two. Not only was Arabic the language of religion, but a large amount of Persian vocabulary had originally been borrowed from Arabic, and it is possible that many Arabic words entered Turkish by way of Persian. What’s more, “when an Arabic word was borrowed it brought its whole family with it.”⁵⁶ That is to say, when an Arabic word was borrowed into Turkish, it was borrowed along with the whole “family” of words that were derived from the same Arabic root. And with each new foreign word that was borrowed into the Turkish language, “the corresponding Turkish word was forgotten or became

⁵⁴ Mardin, *Genesis of Young Ottoman Thought*, 228.

⁵⁵ G. Lewis, *Turkish Language Reform*, 5.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 6.

restricted to the speech of the common people.”⁵⁷

Not only was a large amount of Arabic and Persian vocabulary borrowed into Turkish, but Persian and Arabic grammatical rules were also adopted. While Turkish (like Persian) is “free of that disease of language known as grammatical gender,” Arabic is not, and Arabic borrowings into Turkish were still made to agree with one another in gender.⁵⁸ Furthermore, a noun and its qualifier were connected in the Persian manner, with the *-i* of Persian *izafet*. For example, the name of the “New Literature” movement of the late nineteenth century is *Edebiyat-ı Cedide*. Both words are Arabic. Since *edebiyat* is feminine, *cedid* is used in its feminine form, *cedide*. The two words are then connected in the Persian fashion, with the adjective following the noun and connected with the *-i* of *izafet*, and the *-i* of *izafet* is then subject to the rules of Turkish vowel harmony. The simpler colloquial way to say this would be *Yeni Edebiyat*, with the invariable Turkish adjective preceding the noun and without the *izafet*.⁵⁹

Ottoman writers, especially beginning in the fifteenth century, took Persian literature as their model and filled their works with borrowed Persian words, particularly in poetry.⁶⁰ The result of all this borrowing was the creation of a literary language completely different from the language of the masses. Bernard Lewis describes it as “vast expanses of contorted syntax and swollen verbiage where the thin rivulet of meaning was lost in the

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 7. The Persian *izafet* is used to indicate that two words are linked. Specifically, it is placed after a noun to indicate that it is qualified by the following noun or adjective. Turkish has a different way of indicating that one noun qualifies another, and when a noun is qualified by an adjective it does not mark either of them.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

trackless wilderness of words.”⁶¹ Shortly after the French Revolution, Ahmet Atuf Efendi wrote with horror of how “famous atheists” like Rousseau and Voltaire used “easily intelligible words and phrases, in the form of mockery, in the language of the common people.”⁶² In short, writing something for mass consumption was simply inconceivable at that point. The funny side of the huge gulf between the language of the court and the language of the common people can be seen in the traditional shadow theater, where Hacivat speaks Ottoman and Karagöz speaks colloquial Turkish. When Karagöz fails to understand what Hacivat is saying, he responds with something that sounds similar in everyday Turkish but means something completely different, to comic effect.⁶³

While a sound knowledge of Arabic and Persian was needed to read or write Ottoman Turkish, at the same time many Arabic and Persian words entered the speech of the common people and were completely assimilated, in some cases becoming almost unrecognizable or taking on new meanings. For people educated in the classical tradition these *galatat-ı meşhure*, or mistakes consecrated by usage, were considered vulgar and incorrect.⁶⁴ This served to further differentiate the language of the elite from the language of the masses.

In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries there was a short-lived movement to write poetry in “plain Turkish” (*Türki-i basit*), but it had no lasting effects.⁶⁵ The Persian influence on Ottoman literature declined somewhat in the eighteenth century, but the situation did not

⁶¹ B. Lewis, *Emergence of Modern Turkey*, 426.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 66.

⁶³ G. Lewis, *Turkish Language Reform*, 8.

⁶⁴ Heyd, *Language Reform in Modern Turkey*, 10-1.

⁶⁵ G. Lewis, *Turkish Language Reform*, 12.

begin to change significantly until the *Tanzimat* period in the nineteenth century when printed books became more commonplace and the first Turkish newspapers appeared.⁶⁶ However, an important early step towards simplification was taken by Akif Paşa, who earlier in the nineteenth century stopped using the old chancery style and contributed to “the development of a simpler and more direct prose style better suited to the needs of a modern state.”⁶⁷

With their conversion to Islam, the Turks also began using the Arabic script. When the Persians converted to Islam and adopted the Arabic script, they added several new characters to represent the Persian sounds that did not exist in Arabic. With the addition of these extra characters, the Arabo-Persian script was capable of representing all the consonants of Persian, and also of Turkish. However, Arabic has a number of sounds that are alien to both Persian and Turkish. When Persians and Turks borrowed words from Arabic, they retained the original Arabic spelling, complete with characters that were then either not pronounced or else were assimilated to the nearest equivalent in Persian or Turkish, at least in the speech of the common people. Thus, ذ , ز , ض , and ظ would all be pronounced z, while in Arabic they represent four distinct sounds. Conversely, the Arabic ك was used to represent Turkish g, k, n, or y. In Arabic it represents k, while the Persian variant گ to represent g was often written without the distinguishing upper stroke. The n represented by ن was originally /ng/ as in English *singer*, but it gradually came to be pronounced like a normal n.⁶⁸ This sound could also be represented by a

⁶⁶ Davison, *Reform in the Ottoman Empire*, 176.

⁶⁷ B. Lewis, *Emergence of Modern Turkey*, 105, 429.

⁶⁸ G. Lewis, *Turkish Language Reform*, 27.

different modified form of ك , but again the distinguishing strokes were normally left out.

The main problem, however, was with the vowels. Arabic has only three vowel sounds, but with long and short versions of each. The long vowels are written while the short vowels usually are not, though there are diacritical marks that can be used to indicate the short vowels if necessary. Persian has six vowels and these are indicated using the standard Arabic characters, meaning that the three Persian vowels that are represented by the Arabic diacritical vowel markers are normally not written. This can sometimes lead to ambiguity. In Turkish the situation is even worse, since Turkish has eight vowels. Vowels were often not written, or else only some of the vowels in a word were written, and even then there was often a considerable degree of ambiguity. The Arabo-Persian script simply was not equipped to deal with Turkish vowels, and solving this problem would require the creation of new characters, or at least of new diacritical marks. So along with the rapid rise of Turkish publishing in the nineteenth century, Ottoman intellectuals began to turn their attention to the problem of modifying the script to better reflect the sounds of the Turkish language.

The Rise of Turkish Book Publishing

Books were printed in the Ottoman Empire as early as the 1490s, when Jews who had fled Spain set up presses in Istanbul and Salonica. An Armenian press was set up in 1567 with equipment brought from Italy, and in 1627 Nicomedus Metaxas purchased a press

from London and began printing books in Greek. However, there were no Turkish books printed until İbrahim Müteferrika (1670?-1745) set up his press in 1729.⁶⁹

A total of approximately 180 Turkish books were published in the period from 1729 to 1830. Ottoman printed books then began appearing regularly in the 1830s, and “literary works, especially the *Divans*, were made accessible to a larger public, hitherto unable to buy the costly manuscripts.”⁷⁰ In the eighteenth century, translation efforts had been focused not only on western military texts, but also on the “most popular ‘classics’ of Ottoman and earlier Islamic culture,” and in the nineteenth century this “culminated in a real flowering of translations from the Arabic and the Persian.”⁷¹

The *Takvimhane-i Âmire*, a printing house founded in 1831 to publish the official newspaper *Takvim-i Vekayi*, also printed books, and beginning in 1840 anyone could pay to have a book printed there. More publishing houses were opened in the 1830s, 40s and 50s, many of which printed textbooks for use in the growing number of schools. Also, in 1847 the state began publishing an official yearbook, or *salname*.⁷²

Along with the rise in literacy brought about by the new secular schools of the *Tanzimat* “innumerable public and private Ottoman presses and publishing houses were established in Istanbul and the other major cities, producing almost 3000 books during the next half-

⁶⁹ Selim Nüzhet Gerçek, *Türk Matbaacılığı*, vol. 1, *Müteferrika Matbaası* (İstanbul: Devlet Basımevi, 1939), 26-30, 60.

⁷⁰ Jale Baysal, “Turkish Publishing Activities before and after the New Alphabet,” *Anatolica* 8 (1981): 117, 122. *Divan* refers to a collection of poetry, specifically of classical Ottoman poetry.

⁷¹ Mardin, *Genesis of Young Ottoman Thought*, 203.

⁷² Server R. İskit, *Türkiyede Neşriyat Hareketleri Tarihine Bir Bakış* (İstanbul: Devlet Basımevi, 1939), 29-30, 34, 38.

century.”⁷³ Improvements to the copyright laws in 1857 also led to an increase in the number of publishers and publications,⁷⁴ and publishing activity continued to grow as the century went by, with an estimated 3,200 books published in the much shorter period from 1876 to 1890.⁷⁵ By 1883 there were 54 publishing houses in Istanbul alone.⁷⁶

Along with the rise in publishing activity, the Turks began to take more of an interest in their own language. In 1851 the *Kavaid-i Osmaniye* (Ottoman Rules) of Ahmet Cevdet Paşa (1825-1895) and Fuat Paşa (1815-1868) was published. This book was actually one of the handful of books prepared for the *Encümen-i Daniş*, and certainly the most significant. It was “the first Turkish work on Turkish grammar to be printed, and a landmark in the linguistic reform.”⁷⁷ The 1875 edition was renamed *Kavaid-i Türkiye*, but the first grammar written by a Turk to actually refer to the language as Turkish was the *İlm-i Sarf-i Türkî* of Süleyman Hüsnü Paşa (d. 1892), published in 1874. Another grammar of this period, that of Abdullah Ramiz Paşa, was published in 1868 and entitled *Lisan-ı Osmanî'nin Kavaidini Hâvi Emsile-i Türkî* (Paradigms of Turkish, Containing the Rules of the Ottoman Language).⁷⁸

The *Kavaid-i Osmaniye* was partly inspired by the *Grammar of the Turkish Language* by Arthur Lumley Davids, published in London in 1832. Davids' book was also influential because of its long historical introduction on the Turkish peoples, an example of how European Turcology helped reacquaint Ottoman Turks with their “forgotten and rejected”

⁷³ Shaw and Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire*, 128.

⁷⁴ İskit, *Türkiyede Neşriyat Hareketleri*, 50-4.

⁷⁵ Baysal, “Turkish Publishing,” 118.

⁷⁶ İskit, *Türkiyede Neşriyat Hareketleri*, 97.

⁷⁷ B. Lewis, *Emergence of Modern Turkey*, 118.

⁷⁸ G. Lewis, *Turkish Language Reform*, 16.

pre-Islamic history.⁷⁹ A French edition of this book was published a few years after the original English edition, and the author's sympathetic discussion of "the past glories of the Turks" would later have a great influence on one of the Young Ottomans, Ali Suavi.⁸⁰

Another important book was Mustafa Celaledin's *Les Turcs anciens et modernes*, written in French and published in Istanbul in 1869. Mustafa Celaledin was actually a Turcophile, Russophobe Pole, born Konstanty Polkozic-Borzęcki, who had fled his native land and joined the Ottoman army. In his book, he tried to show that the Turks were racially and linguistically related to the Europeans, developing "an early kind of Turkish nationalism, based on historical and linguistic argument."⁸¹

As early as the 1850s authors such as Ahmet Cevdet Paşa began writing in a simpler and more modern style, though without making much progress in using Turkish rather than Arabic or Persian words. By the 1860s it was evident that tastes had changed, and clarity of expression was given more weight than previously. There were fewer instances of sentences that lasted for several pages, and there was also more regularity in spelling and punctuation.⁸²

Another important development was the translation of European literature, which began in earnest in 1859 when İbrahim Şinasi (1824-1871) published a book of French poetry and Mehmet Münif Paşa (1828-1910) published a selection of dialogues by Voltaire,

⁷⁹ B. Lewis, *Emergence of Modern Turkey*, 345-6.

⁸⁰ Mardin, *Genesis of Young Ottoman Thought*, 250.

⁸¹ Davison, *Reform in the Ottoman Empire*, 231.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 178-80.

Fontenelle and Fénelon. Fénelon's novel *Les Aventures de Télémaque* was then translated by Yusuf Kâmil Paşa and published in 1862.⁸³ The translation of *Télémaque*, which had actually begun circulating in manuscript form in 1859, was significant in that it marked an early step in the “‘politicization’ of intellectual productions.”⁸⁴ The book deals with the path that should be taken by a just ruler, but is written in the form of a novel.

Only two other European novels had been translated into Turkish by 1870: Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables* in 1862 and Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* in 1864.⁸⁵ However, beginning in the 1870s there were more translations of works by authors such as Voltaire, Lamartine and Chateaubriand. The translation movement introduced the novel and the drama to Turkish readers, and also helped introduce new concepts such as patriotism.⁸⁶

From about the middle of the [nineteenth] century the spread of Western ideas and the acclimatization of Western social and political attitudes among the Turks was greatly accelerated by the rise of a new Turkish literature, differing both in form and in content from classical Ottoman writings. In it the literature of France had begun to replace the classics of Iran as the source of inspiration and the model for imitation.⁸⁷

The Turkish novel was originated by Ahmet Midhat (1844-1912). Midhat, who exhibited a “mastery over the popular language” in his writing, used his novels to teach and moralize as well as to entertain, which included tackling such issues as slavery and the equality of women.⁸⁸ In addition to being considered the father of the Turkish novel,

⁸³ Bombaci, *Letteratura Turca*, 424-5.

⁸⁴ Mardin, *Genesis of Young Ottoman Thought*, 241-2.

⁸⁵ Berkes, *Development of Secularism in Turkey*, 283. This translation of *Robinson Crusoe* was actually made from the Arabic, according to Bombaci, *Letteratura Turca*, 424.

⁸⁶ B. Lewis, *Emergence of Modern Turkey*, 439.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 136.

⁸⁸ Berkes, *Development of Secularism in Turkey*, 282-3.

Midhat was the first Turkish writer to write European-style short stories in the 1870s.⁸⁹ He also was the first writer to examine and critique the half-westernized Turk and discuss “the true meaning of Westernization” with his readers, something which “became one of the important factors in the Turkish awakening.”⁹⁰

[Midhat] utilized the narrative technique of the *meddah* (story teller) in the modern novel form. Some of his plots were even taken over from *meddah* stories. Like the ancient story tellers, he conversed with his readers, asked their opinions about the behaviour of the characters, and answered the questions that they were likely to ask. He kept in constant contact with his readers and, by doing so, encouraged them to read.⁹¹

The Birth of Turkish Journalism

The first newspaper to appear in the Ottoman Empire was published by the French Embassy in Istanbul from 1796 to 1798, and other French newspapers were published in Izmir in the 1820s. The “first indigenous newspaper published in the Middle East” appeared in Egypt in 1828 in Turkish and Arabic, and Sultan Mahmut II followed up in 1831 with the *Moniteur ottoman*.⁹² A Turkish version appeared later the same year under the title *Takvim-i Vekayi* (Calendar of Events), and was “required reading for public officials.”⁹³ While this was “not a paper that could be read and understood by the man in the street,” the editor, Esad Efendi, “seems to have been the first writer to feel the need for simplification of written Turkish.”⁹⁴

⁸⁹ Bombaci, *Letteratura Turca*, 435.

⁹⁰ Berkes, *Development of Secularism in Turkey*, 284.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 283.

⁹² B. Lewis, *Emergence of Modern Turkey*, 94-5.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ Berkes, *Development of Secularism in Turkey*, 127.

The first non-official newspaper to appear in Turkish was the *Ceride-i Havadis* (Journal of News) in 1840. Started by the English journalist William Churchill and passed to his son on his death in 1864, the *Ceride-i Havadis* “enjoyed a virtual monopoly of journalism in the Turkish language” until İbrahim Şinasi and Çapanzade Agah Efendi founded the *Tercüman-i Ahval* (Interpreter of Conditions) in 1860.⁹⁵ As its circulation grew,

the editors of the *Ceride-i Havadis* began to simplify the language in which the journal was written, gradually abandoning the cumbersome chancery style which they had previously shared with the official gazette, and adopting a simpler and more direct form of language. Turkish journealese was born in their columns.⁹⁶

Journalists such as Mustafa Sami, Hafız Müşfik and Ali Âli would later be remembered by the Young Ottomans as the writers responsible for the creation of a new journalistic style and language “aimed at conveying ideas rather than at titillating the brain.”⁹⁷

Along with the newspapers, there is a journal from this period that deserves mention. In 1861 Münif Paşa, who himself had been making efforts to write in a more accessible style in the 1850s, founded the *Cemiyet-i İlmiye-yi Osmaniye* (Ottoman Scientific Society) and also served as its president. The Society opened a library and offered courses to the public. Its journal, the *Mecmua-i Fünûn* (Journal of Sciences), appeared for several years beginning in 1862. It was written in a clear, simple language that could be understood by a wider audience and served to introduce many Ottoman readers to western scientific ideas.⁹⁸

⁹⁵ B. Lewis, *Emergence of Modern Turkey*, 146-7.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 147.

⁹⁷ Mardin, *Genesis of Young Ottoman Thought*, 257-8.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 229, 238-9; İskit, *Türkiyede Neşriyat Hareketleri*, 54-7; Davison, *Reform in the Ottoman Empire*, 181.

Picking up where earlier journalists had left off, it was İbrahim Şinasi who eventually perfected the new “journalistic” Turkish.⁹⁹ Şinasi, considered the “father of Turkish journalism,” was the editor of the *Tercüman-i Ahval*, and in his first editorial he wrote of the paper’s “duty to write this newspaper in a way that will easily be understood by the public at large.”¹⁰⁰ *Tercüman-i Ahval* was the first non-official Turkish newspaper to be published by Ottoman Turks, and “the first newspaper of opinion in the real sense.”¹⁰¹ It was “a hothouse for Turkish ideologues,” and has the distinction of being the first newspaper to be suspended for displeasing the Ottoman government.¹⁰²

In 1862 Şinasi, “finding his freedom of expression restricted” after the government shut down the paper for two weeks, left and founded his own newspaper, *Tasvir-i Efkâr* (Illustration of Opinion).¹⁰³ The *Tasvir-i Efkâr* later grew more “outspokenly political” under the editorship of Namık Kemal (1840-1888), while Ali Suavi’s (1837-1878) *Muhbir* (Informer), started in 1867, was even “more radical in tone and content.”¹⁰⁴ Many of the writers for these papers fled to Europe after coming under increasing pressure from the government, continuing to write and publish from abroad. This group of intellectuals active in the 1860s and 1870s, though they were far from being a homogeneous group, became known collectively as the *Yeni Osmanlılar*, or in English as the Young Ottomans. Şerif Mardin describes them as the “earliest modern Turkish intelligentsia.”¹⁰⁵ They originally organized as a secret society, the Young Ottoman Society, which was founded

⁹⁹ Mardin, *Genesis of Young Ottoman Thought*, 257.

¹⁰⁰ G. Lewis, *Turkish Language Reform*, 12-3.

¹⁰¹ Berkes, *Development of Secularism in Turkey*, 197.

¹⁰² Mardin, *Genesis of Young Ottoman Thought*, 259.

¹⁰³ B. Lewis, *Emergence of Modern Turkey*, 147-8.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 148-9.

¹⁰⁵ Mardin, *Genesis of Young Ottoman Thought*, 9.

in 1865.¹⁰⁶ The first Turkish press law was implemented at the beginning of that same year, as the government grew more concerned with reigning in the growing and increasingly vigorous press.¹⁰⁷

Concerning the effects of the rise of Turkish journalism from the 1860s on, Kemal Karpat writes:

The press, which aimed at reaching large audiences in order to educate them first in the ways of “civilization,” and then orient them toward opposition to the government, used a simplified language that could be understood by the local masses. In many ways the first seeds of separation as well as of nationalism among some Muslims can be found in the linguistic differences sharpened by increased communication. The Arab newspapers used Arabic in order to reach their audience; the Ottoman intelligentsia had to write in Turkish, addressing a Turkish audience by striving to simplify the language and to bring forth the virtues of Turkish. Inadvertently, it thereby rejected the primacy of Arabic, the language of the Prophet. Concomitant with this development, the concept of a territorial state... and the idea of seeing the motherland as synonymous with the state made their appearances, notably in literature.¹⁰⁸

The Young Ottomans

Some of the more important Young Ottoman intellectuals were İbrahim Şinasi, Ziya Paşa (1825-1880), Ali Suavi, and Namık Kemal. Şinasi’s journal *Tasvir-i Efkâr*, which he began publishing and editing in 1862, played a very important role in Ottoman intellectual life during this period.¹⁰⁹ Şerif Mardin writes that “the prestige of the *Tasvir-i Efkâr* reached a peak as a result of the fame Şinasi gained from a full-fledged battle

¹⁰⁶ Shaw and Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire*, 131.

¹⁰⁷ B. Lewis, *Emergence of Modern Turkey*, 149.

¹⁰⁸ Karpat, *Social Foundations of Nationalism*, 103.

¹⁰⁹ B. Lewis, *Emergence of Modern Turkey*, 137.

against the partisans of classical Turkish style.”¹¹⁰ Namık Kemal came under Şinasi’s influence and began working with him on *Tasvir-i Efkâr*, first as a translator and later as an essayist. He became the editor in 1865 when Şinasi fled to France, and he himself fled to Europe in 1867 along with Ziya and the other Young Ottomans when his writings created problems with the authorities.¹¹¹

The Young Ottoman newspaper *Hürriyet* (Liberty) first appeared in London in 1868, and both Namık Kemal and Ziya Paşa were closely involved in its publication. The first issue began with the two major themes of the Young Ottomans, Ottoman patriotism and “a plea for consultative and representative government.”¹¹² The Young Ottomans believed that a constitution was needed to protect the individual from the tyranny of the government. In addition, they thought that participation in an Ottoman parliament would promote Ottoman patriotism among the different groups in the empire and at the same time “provide a harmless outlet for national feelings” by giving these groups a voice in government.¹¹³ The constitutional movement hoped to see their plans carried out when Murat, the heir-apparent, became sultan.¹¹⁴ They had problems with the increasingly autocratic Sultan Abdülaziz (1861-1876), and wished to see him replaced by a new sultan who would be more amenable to their plans.

Namık Kemal is “best known in Turkey as the apostle of two ideas: freedom and

¹¹⁰ Mardin, *Genesis of Young Ottoman Thought*, 262.

¹¹¹ B. Lewis, *Emergence of Modern Turkey*, 141.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 154-5.

¹¹³ Shaw and Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire*, 132.

¹¹⁴ Davison, *Reform in the Ottoman Empire*, 300.

fatherland.”¹¹⁵ His patriotic play *Vatan yahut Silistre* (Fatherland or Silistria), first produced in 1873, “aroused such dangerous enthusiasms that the author was imprisoned in Cyprus, where he remained for over three years,” and much of the rest of his life was spent in exile or in prison.¹¹⁶ The authorities did not look favorably on the idea of loyalty directed not towards the Sultan or the Islamic community, but towards “an abstract and unfamiliar entity called the Fatherland.”¹¹⁷

While the Young Ottomans did not break with the Ottomanism of the *Tanzimat*, they were critical of its secularism. In their view the *Tanzimat* reforms represented a concession to the western powers, and they were also critical of the fact that the reforms were not limited by the *şeriat* (Islamic law).¹¹⁸ Namık Kemal criticized the *Tanzimat* for its separation of state and religion, which in his view “not only damaged the religious foundation of the state but also cleared the way for European interference” on behalf of the non-Muslim *millet*s.¹¹⁹ Namık Kemal was “a sincere and devoted Muslim, and the Fatherland of which he speaks, though he uses a term denoting territory and not community, is Islamic no less than Ottoman.”¹²⁰ In fact, Mardin writes that “the Young Ottomans ‘invented’ Pan-Islamism.”¹²¹ While “an amorphous proto-Pan-Islamism had for some time been implicit in the Young Ottoman position,” it was after their return from exile that the idea of Islamic union became more explicit in their discussions, for example

¹¹⁵ B. Lewis, *Emergence of Modern Turkey*, 141.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 158.

¹¹⁸ Mardin, *Genesis of Young Ottoman Thought*, 163-4.

¹¹⁹ Berkes, *Development of Secularism in Turkey*, 217.

¹²⁰ B. Lewis, *Emergence of Modern Turkey*, 141-2.

¹²¹ Mardin, *Genesis of Young Ottoman Thought*, 60.

in Namık Kemal's 1872 writings in the newspaper *İbret* (Admonition).¹²²

Both Şinasi and Namık Kemal were influenced by the romantic ideal of having a literature that was oriented towards the people, and they were among the first writers who began to see the enormous gap between the literary language and the spoken language as a problem. Şinasi, in a verse translation of a La Fontaine fable, declared that he was using "the language of the common people" (*lisan-i avam*),¹²³ and he experimented in writing poetry using only Turkish words.¹²⁴ Namık Kemal went even further than Şinasi or Münif Paşa in using the vernacular to reach a wider audience.¹²⁵ Still, while Namık Kemal was worried about the conflicting Arabic, Persian and Turkish elements in the literary language, he was not always faithful to the idea of writing in a more natural colloquial style.¹²⁶

Ziya Paşa educated himself by studying the Persian masters, and he later worked in the court where he learned French and made several translations. He was critical of both the flowery old Ottoman style and of the complex bureaucratic language of his time, but in general he was happy with the "three oceans" (Arabic, Persian and Turkish) that made up the Ottoman language.¹²⁷ In a famous article which appeared in *Hürriyet* in 1868 entitled "Şiir ve İnşa" (Poetry and Prose), Ziya "destroys the Turkish classical style as cumbersome, complicated, and a means of keeping the people in subservience."¹²⁸

¹²² Ibid., 61.

¹²³ Bombaci, *Letteratura Turca*, 426, 433.

¹²⁴ Davison, *Reform in the Ottoman Empire*, 184.

¹²⁵ Mardin, *Genesis of Young Ottoman Thought*, 283.

¹²⁶ Bombaci, *Letteratura Turca*, 433.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 427-8, 433.

¹²⁸ Mardin, *Genesis of Young Ottoman Thought*, 340.

However, he was not always consistent in his writings and sometimes seemed to hold the opposite point of view.

While many of the Young Ottomans wrote about the language problem, about the need to write in a style that people could understand or about the problems involved in using a language that borrowed so heavily from other languages, much of what they wrote was still full of Persian *izafet* constructions and difficult Arabic and Persian vocabulary. Geoffrey Lewis points out a general trend stretching to the end of the century, where even though “the new newspapers and magazines frequently carried articles urging the use of simple Turkish, they tended to urge it in very complicated language.”¹²⁹ The writers of this period could not escape the fact that they had been brought up on the old *divan* literature, and though the language they used and developed was different from the old, it was still very far from the spoken language.¹³⁰

One of the first people to advocate using Turkish words instead of their Arabic or Persian equivalents was Ali Suavi. He “spoke out against calling the language Ottoman.” and also proved himself capable of writing without the Persian *izafet*.¹³¹ He was against using Arabic and Persian grammatical forms in Turkish, and favored forming the plurals of Arabic words with the regular Turkish plural suffix instead of using the irregular Arabic broken plural, for example *âlimler* instead of *ulemâ*.¹³² Ali Suavi broke with the Young Ottomans in 1868, and following the closure of *Muhbir*, which he had continued

¹²⁹ G. Lewis, *Turkish Language Reform*, 13, 15.

¹³⁰ Levend, *Türk Dilinde Gelişme*, 84.

¹³¹ G. Lewis, *Turkish Language Reform*, 14-5.

¹³² Yusuf Ziya Öksüz, *Türkçenin Sadeleşme Tarihi: Genç Kalemler ve Yeni Lisan Hareketi* (Ankara: Yükseköğretim Kurulu Matbaası, 1995), 23.

publishing in London, he moved to France where he continued writing and publishing on his own. "It was at this period that he began to express, for the first time, the idea of a *Turkish* as distinct from an Islamic or Ottoman loyalty."¹³³ Still, Şerif Mardin writes that Ali Suavi "was still too much interested in all of his Islamic brethren to be labeled a 'Turkist' although 'Turks' were given greater importance in his writings than heretofore."¹³⁴

In his personal letters written in 1878, Namık Kemal wrote of the need to "annihilate all languages in our country except Turkish."¹³⁵ While he recognized the impossibility of accomplishing this with Greeks or Bulgarians, he believed that the Muslim Albanians and Lazs could be assimilated by teaching them Turkish in school.¹³⁶ While Turkish nationalism only developed later on, the Ottoman patriotism of the Young Ottomans was in many ways an early step in that direction.

Early Efforts at Script Reform

Starting in the middle of the nineteenth century, various intellectuals proposed modifying the Arabic script to better reflect the sounds of Turkish. For some, the huge gap between the written language and the spoken language of the masses could be boiled down to the question of literacy, and script reform was seen as a way to promote literacy.¹³⁷

¹³³ B. Lewis, *Emergence of Modern Turkey*, 154-5.

¹³⁴ Mardin, *Genesis of Young Ottoman Thought*, 372.

¹³⁵ Arai, *Turkish Nationalism*, 3.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Berkes, *Development of Secularism in Turkey*, 195.

Proponents of reforming the Arabic script to better suit the Turkish language often started by looking at و, a letter that could stand for the five sounds now represented by o, ö, u, ü, and v in the new alphabet. Reformers usually suggested placing various signs above the و to remedy the ambiguity.

The belief that the script should be modified or reformed was expressed for perhaps the first time by Ahmet Cevdet Paşa in 1851, though in the early nineteenth century the calligrapher Mustafa Rakım Efendi had reportedly proposed a “new, simplified system of calligraphy.”¹³⁸ In their 1851 grammar book *Kavaid-i Osmaniye*, Ahmet Cevdet Paşa and Fuat Paşa “employed two diacritical marks to show accurately some of the vowel sounds.”¹³⁹ They also devised a simplified script and “used it to increase the speed of reading among elementary school students.”¹⁴⁰

The *Encümen-i Daniş* devised a system for indicating the vowels that was used in the *salnames* for a few years beginning in 1854. In this system, a small numeral seven or eight (٧ or ٨) was placed either above or below the و to indicate which of the four possible vowels it stood for, while other diacritical marks were used to differentiate a from e and ı from i. So for example öç (revenge) could now be distinguished from üç (three) by writing them ٧چ and ٨چ respectively, whereas without the diacritical marks the two words would be written identically.¹⁴¹

¹³⁸ Mardin, *Genesis of Young Ottoman Thought*, 264. Mardin does not give any further details, nor does he give the date.

¹³⁹ Davison, *Reform in the Ottoman Empire*, 179.

¹⁴⁰ Mardin, *Genesis of Young Ottoman Thought*, 264.

¹⁴¹ Iskit, *Türkiyede Neşriyat Hareketleri*, 330-1.

Later on, in a May 1862 address to the Ottoman Scientific Society, Münif Paşa proposed two different ways the script could be modified. The first was to introduce five additional diacritical marks which, together with the three that already existed, would allow the script to represent all eight Turkish vowels. The second and more radical possibility was to write each character separately, including the five new diacritics which would also be written on the line as full characters.¹⁴² Münif Paşa also reportedly “harbored thoughts of giving up the Arabic alphabet altogether.”¹⁴³

Another proposal in this period was that of Fath-Ali Ahundzade (1811-1878), an Azerbaijani dramatist and political scientist who, during an 1863 visit to Istanbul, suggested adding several new characters to represent the vowels. The Ottoman Scientific Society considered and rejected his proposal.¹⁴⁴ Following the rejection of his proposal, he also reportedly “was willing to adopt the Latin alphabet.”¹⁴⁵

The impetus for these early proposals for script reform originated with the belief that the inadequacies of the Arabic script were to blame for the low level of literacy among the Ottoman Turks. As the issue grew into a public controversy in 1869, Namık Kemal pointed out that the literacy rate in England and the United States was very high despite the irregularities of English spelling, while the Spaniards with their phonetic alphabet had a much lower literacy rate. In the end, he believed that the practical difficulties involved

¹⁴² G. Lewis, *Turkish Language Reform*, 28.

¹⁴³ Davison, *Reform in the Ottoman Empire*, 179.

¹⁴⁴ G. Lewis, *Turkish Language Reform*, 28.

¹⁴⁵ Davison, *Reform in the Ottoman Empire*, 179.

in changing the script would be too great. Later on, in a letter written in 1878, he advocated modifying the Arabic script but not abandoning it.¹⁴⁶

All of the issues which were discussed by the Young Ottomans and their generation would continue to be discussed in the following decades as well, as the ranks of the intelligentsia grew and the Turkish press continued to develop.

¹⁴⁶ B. Lewis, *Emergence of Modern Turkey*, 428.

CHAPTER TWO

THE REIGN OF ABDŪLHAMĪT II

The First Constitutional Period

The constitution that the Young Ottomans had long agitated for finally became a reality in 1876. Sultan Abdülaziz was deposed on May 30, 1876 and Prince Murat became Sultan Murat V. On June 4, Abdülaziz was found dead in his apartment, and while it was apparently a suicide there were rumors that he had been assassinated to prevent his return to the throne. Murat was already of fragile mental health, and now his condition grew even worse. He was deposed on September 1, and Abdülhamit II (1876-1909) became the new sultan.¹⁴⁷ The Ottoman Constitution, which was drafted the same year, was promulgated on December 23, 1876. This was just a few days after Midhat Paşa, the driving force behind the implementation of the Constitution, was reappointed Grand Vizier by Abdülhamit.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁷ Shaw and Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire*, 163-7.

¹⁴⁸ B. Lewis, *Emergence of Modern Turkey*, 164.

The 1876 Constitution made Turkish the official language and referred to it as Turkish, not Ottoman.¹⁴⁹ It also made Ottomanism “the official policy of the empire, embodying the concept of equality contributed by the Tanzimat and endeavoring to eliminate the separatism of the *millet* system.”¹⁵⁰ In the Ottoman Parliament, Christians were actually better represented than Muslims when one looks at the ratio of deputies to population, with 44 Christian deputies and 71 Muslim deputies. Even the tiny Jewish minority had 4 deputies in the Parliament.¹⁵¹ This Ottoman equality was however limited by the qualification that deputies had to know Turkish, which merely meant that they had to *speak* the official language. At the end of four years they would also have to be able to read Turkish and, “as far as possible,” to write it.¹⁵²

Sultan Abdülhamit ultimately dissolved the Ottoman Parliament and suspended the Constitution on February 14, 1878. This was facilitated by the Russian war of 1877-1878.¹⁵³ Concerning the fallout from the entire constitutional experience, Şerif Mardin writes that

the most important result of [the Young Ottoman] propagandistic efforts was not so much the proclamation of the Ottoman constitution as the establishment of the belief that Sultan Abdülhamid had perpetrated a crime in suspending it. It is this belief, which would not have been widely held before the appearance of the Young Ottomans, which fed the underground opposition to the sultan between 1878 and 1908.¹⁵⁴

Sultan Abdülhamit’s rule grew increasingly autocratic, lasting for over thirty years. The Ottoman Constitution would not be reinstated until the revolution of 1908.

¹⁴⁹ G. Lewis, *Turkish Language Reform*, 16.

¹⁵⁰ Shaw and Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire*, 177.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 181.

¹⁵² Davison, *Reform in the Ottoman Empire*, 388.

¹⁵³ B. Lewis, *Emergence of Modern Turkey*, 169.

¹⁵⁴ Mardin, *Genesis of Young Ottoman Thought*, 403.

Islamism and Pan-Islamism

Under Abdülhamit, Islamism became the “most widespread ideological force in the Ottoman Empire.”¹⁵⁵ It was used as “an ideological weapon... to counter the imperialism of the Western powers as well as the minority nationalist movements.”¹⁵⁶ In fact, this emphasis on Islamism and on the Caliphate had begun under Abdülaziz, but it was more fully realized under Abdülhamit and is often closely associated with his long reign.¹⁵⁷

In the 1870s, Ottoman Turks grew more interested in the plight of other Turkic peoples as Russia made advances in Central Asia. While Pan-Turkism would only develop later on, concerns about Central Asia gave rise to “a political Russophobia and an emphasis on Islam which more and more verged on pan-Islamic sentiment.”¹⁵⁸ Pan-Islamism at this point developed in response to Pan-Slavism and European imperialism, and on an international scale it represented merely “a futile search for military aid and a sentimental attachment to the concept of the caliphate.”¹⁵⁹ However, within the Ottoman Empire it contributed to “a sort of Islamic patriotism” coupled with rising anti-European sentiment, and Ottoman diplomacy grew “more unyielding than it had previously been.”¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁵ Shaw and Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire*, 259.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 260.

¹⁵⁷ B. Lewis, *Emergence of Modern Turkey*, 123-4.

¹⁵⁸ Davison, *Reform in the Ottoman Empire*, 274.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 275-7.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 277.

Abdülhamit simply took advantage of the Pan-Islamic sentiment that already existed among his Muslim subjects, using it to “strengthen his hand against enemies both at home and abroad.”¹⁶¹ Starting with the idea that the Ottoman state was predominantly Muslim and that the dominant culture was Islamic, he “began to identify himself with the religious sentiments and political aspirations of Muslims throughout the world by making wide use of his title as Caliph.”¹⁶² The Arabic language also gained prominence “as a language of culture and even administration,” though it was never officially made into a second official language alongside Ottoman Turkish.¹⁶³ Still, through this period there was increased borrowing from Arabic into Turkish, both of words and expressions.¹⁶⁴

Hamidian Reforms and Continued Modernization

Binnaz Toprak writes that “Ottoman intellectual history of the 19th century is the history of two conflicting viewpoints, one of which saw Western superiority only in technical terms while the other saw a necessity to embrace Western culture as well.... Modernization in the Turkish context has always been synonymous with Westernization.”¹⁶⁵ The conflict then was between Islamists on the one hand and Westernizers on the other. While it is true that there was a renewed emphasis on Arabic and Islamic culture during the reign of Abdülhamit II, at the same time he continued the process of modernization that had begun under his predecessors.

¹⁶¹ Shaw and Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire*, 259.

¹⁶² Karpas, *Social Foundations of Nationalism*, 107.

¹⁶³ Shaw and Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire*, 260.

¹⁶⁴ Karpas, *Social Foundations of Nationalism*, 107.

¹⁶⁵ Binnaz Toprak, *Islam and Political Development in Turkey* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1981), 58.

Some of the greatest achievements of the Hamidian era were in the field of education. The *Mülkiye* school for training civil servants and the *Harbiye* war college were both expanded, and Abdülhamit opened eighteen more schools of professional and higher education. More *rüşdiye* schools were opened, including separate military *rüşdiyes*. And the *Darülfünun* university, later known as the University of Istanbul, was finally opened in 1900. Also during Abdülhamit's reign the Galatasaray *lycée* "became more Turkish in character," educating the newer generations of the Turkish elite.¹⁶⁶ In the end, Abdülhamit's educational system served to educate the people who would later challenge his authority and eventually bring an end to his reign. As early as 1876, the new generation in the military schools was being raised on Young Ottoman literature.¹⁶⁷

Censorship and Opposition

The censorship that had led the Young Ottomans to flee to Europe in the 1860s was further expanded under Abdülhamit. The Istanbul newspapers were a great annoyance to the sultan, and in 1877 he ordered the writing of a press law to limit the freedom they believed they had under the new constitution.¹⁶⁸ There were many words whose use was simply not allowed, including "constitution," "assassination," and "Murat."¹⁶⁹ Journalists were forced to resort to lengthy paraphrasing to report on matters such as the repairs to the Muradiye mosque in Bursa in 1904, and attributed the deaths of assassinated

¹⁶⁶ B. Lewis, *Emergence of Modern Turkey*, 181-3.

¹⁶⁷ Mardin, *Genesis of Young Ottoman Thought*, 404.

¹⁶⁸ Davison, *Reform in the Ottoman Empire*, 396-7.

¹⁶⁹ Shaw and Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire*, 251.

monarchs to more benign causes such as indigestion.¹⁷⁰ At the same time, publishing activity continued to increase during this period. According to Bernard Lewis,

Even the emasculated and ineffectual newspapers of the Hamidian era... made some contribution to the modernization of Turkey, if only by increasing their numbers and readership and thus accustoming more Turks to the European habit of reading the news every day. No less important than the newspapers were the periodicals and books that were issuing in growing numbers from the printing houses, to satisfy – and again arouse – the appetites of the new literate classes.¹⁷¹

Ahmet Midhat, who had earlier had problems with the censors and been exiled to Rhodes, returned to Istanbul following Abdülhamit's accession and gained the favor of the new sultan. Deciding that "his function in life was educating the masses, not stirring them to revolution," he continued writing during the remainder of the Hamidian period and founded the newspaper *Tercüman-ı Hakikat* (Interpreter of the Truth) in 1878 with financial help from the sultan.¹⁷² According to one estimate, the literacy rate tripled in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Newspaper publishing became profitable, and where earlier journalists of the *Tanzimat* era had been part-time dabblers, a new class of professional journalists was now rapidly emerging.¹⁷³

The deposed Sultan Murat still had his supporters in the Hamidian era, and as the years went by there was growing opposition to Sultan Abdülhamit. Ali Suavi met his end in an early attempt to restore Murat to the throne on May 20, 1878.¹⁷⁴ Various opposition groups began to form later on in the late 1880s, both secret societies inside the empire and

¹⁷⁰ Selim Nüzhet Gerçek, *Türk Gazeteciliği: Yüzüncü Yıl Dönümü Vesilesile* (Istanbul: Devlet Matbaası, 1931), 77-8.

¹⁷¹ B. Lewis, *Emergence of Modern Turkey*, 188.

¹⁷² Shaw and Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire*, 252.

¹⁷³ B. Lewis, *Emergence of Modern Turkey*, 462.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 176.

exile groups in Europe and Egypt. They came to be known collectively as the Young Turks from the title of a newsletter published by one of their number in Paris, *La Jeune Turquie*.¹⁷⁵ In the 1890s “the growth of Young Turk activities abroad led to the worsening of the position of the press at home,” and during this period the “most significant and interesting productions of Turkish journalism” were the works of the Young Turks in Europe.¹⁷⁶ At the same time, the Istanbul press

continued to form its readers in new ways of thought, to inculcate, no doubt unconsciously, European social ideas and attitudes, and to bring to them some notion, however garbled, of the larger, modern world of which Turkey was now a part.¹⁷⁷

The censorship that prevented overt political discussion led the intellectuals of the Hamidian period to turn instead to cultural and historical matters, including heated debates on language and literature. This was an important step in the development of Turkism.¹⁷⁸

Intellectual and Linguistic Developments

The Hamidian period witnessed an increasing number of books devoted to the language and history of the Turks. The early stirrings of a “scientific Turkism” can be seen in works such as the *Lehçe-i Osmanî*, a dictionary of Ottoman Turkish prepared by Ahmet Vefik Paşa (1823-1891) and published in Istanbul in 1876. In his introduction to the dictionary, the author writes about how Ottoman Turkish is a dialect of the Oğuz

¹⁷⁵ Shaw and Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire*, 255.

¹⁷⁶ B. Lewis, *Emergence of Modern Turkey*, 194.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁸ Kushner, *Rise of Turkish Nationalism*, 15.

language and includes a list of Turkish words that are used in Ottoman Turkish. Yusuf Akçura would later call Ahmet Vefik Paşa “the first Turkist of the Ottoman Turks.”¹⁷⁹ Also in 1876, Süleyman Hüsni Paşa published a history textbook for the military secondary schools, entitled *Tarih-i Âlem* (World History), which devoted considerable space to the pre-Islamic history of the Turks.¹⁸⁰

Ironically enough, some of the most important contributions to Ottoman Turkish linguistics and to the development of Turkism in this period came from an Albanian nationalist. In the 1880s and 1890s, Şemseddin Sami Fraşeri (1850-1904) wrote numerous newspaper articles in which he called for an end to excessive borrowing from Arabic and proposed using instead “the discarded words of our original Eastern Turkish language.”¹⁸¹ In the late 1890s, in the middle of a heated debate concerning the simplification of Ottoman Turkish,

Sâmi explained that the disruption of traditional Ottoman was all to the good. From the disintegration of the Ottoman language would arise a modern Turkish; the process of change would continue until written Turkish was freed from the yoke of unassimilated Arabic and Persian rules.¹⁸²

He went on to explain that change in the language was “a reflection of the transformation occurring in the vocabulary and mentality of the people and in literature,” that this was inevitable since the old literature was dead and was being replaced by a new literature influenced by the West, and that the “new Turkish nation... needed its own national

¹⁷⁹ Ercüment Kuran, “The Impact of Nationalism on the Turkish Elite in the Nineteenth Century,” in *Beginnings of Modernization in the Middle East: The Nineteenth Century*, ed. William R. Polk and Richard L. Chambers (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), 111-2.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 113.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 113-4.

¹⁸² Berkes, *Development of Secularism in Turkey*, 320.

language.”¹⁸³ Based on all this, Niyazi Berkes notes that the question of language reform came about “not as a nationalistic question, but as an aspect of the trend of enlightenment,” and that “secular Turkish nationalism came by way of a literary drive rather than as a political movement.”¹⁸⁴

Şemseddin Sami is probably best known for the large dictionary of Ottoman Turkish he prepared, the *Kamus-i Türkî*. Published at the turn of the century, it “reflected more than any other work the Ottoman literary language developed by the modern writers of the nineteenth century.”¹⁸⁵ The *Kamus* used diacritical marks to deal with the ambiguity that could result from the imperfect match between the Arabic characters and the sounds of Turkish, as well as from some of the peculiarities of Turkish spelling. For example, three different marks were placed over the letter و to represent the four different vowels it could stand for in Turkish (o, ö, u, ü). The letter without a diacritical mark represented u, ۆ represented o, وْ stood for ü, and with two dots it represented ö. Different forms of ك (which normally represents k) were also used to differentiate between the several functions it served in Turkish, including the standard Persian variant گ, which represents g.¹⁸⁶

Şemseddin Sami and his brother Abdül Bey are also responsible for the creation of a new alphabet for the Albanian language, made up of thirty-six Latin and Greek letters.

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 320-1.

¹⁸⁵ Shaw and Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire*, 254.

¹⁸⁶ Şemseddin Sami, *Kamus-i Türkî* (Istanbul: İkdâm Matbaası, 1901). It is curious, given the fact that k and g are both distinct sounds in Turkish (while Arabic has no g), that the Persian گ was not widely used in writing Ottoman Turkish.

Albanian suffered from some of the same problems as did Turkish when written in the Arabic script.¹⁸⁷

The *Edebiyat-ı Cedide* (New Literature) movement and the journal *Servet-i Fünun* (The Riches of Science), under the editorship of the poet Tevfik Fikret from 1895-1901, represented a reaction against the earlier steps toward linguistic simplification.

Rejecting the tendencies towards the simplification of the language that had appeared in the preceding period, they wrote in a style that was deliberately recondite and obscure, laden with learned Persian and Arabic words and expressions, and addressed only to a highly educated *élite*.¹⁸⁸

They represented “a U-turn... on the road to making the written language more accessible to the general public,” and their “precious style... repelled the common reader.”¹⁸⁹ Not only did they create new Persian *izafet* compounds on top of those already in common use, they also “liked to show how Westernized they were by using calques, literal translations of French expressions.”¹⁹⁰ Tevfik Fikret took advantage of the different phonetic structures of Arabic, Persian and Turkish in his poetry, but at the same time used western poetic technique and style.¹⁹¹ The style of the *Edebiyat-ı Cedide* writers was in fact so sophisticated that the censors often did not notice their symbolic criticisms of Abdülhamit’s regime, as in Fikret’s famous poem “Sis” (Fog).¹⁹²

¹⁸⁷ G. Lewis, *Turkish Language Reform*, 30.

¹⁸⁸ B. Lewis, *Emergence of Modern Turkey*, 192.

¹⁸⁹ G. Lewis, *Turkish Language Reform*, 18.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ Bombaci, *Letteratura Turca*, 454.

¹⁹² Shaw and Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire*, 255.

Further Developments in Turkism

A new development in Turkish literature appeared at the very end of the nineteenth century with the emergence of a “literary Turkism.”¹⁹³ Following the Greco-Turkish war of 1897, Mehmet Emin (Yurdakul) (1869-1944) published a book of poetry entitled *Türkçe Şiirler* (Turkish Poems):

Abandoning the formal language and quantitative prosody of the Ottoman court poets, [Emin] wrote in simple popular Turkish and in the syllabic metre used in folk poetry. Still more remarkable, he adopted a word which, in Turkish usage, had connoted a boorish, ignorant peasant or nomad, and proudly proclaimed himself a Turk.¹⁹⁴

While Emin considered himself a Muslim first, he helped to introduce this “new concept of identity... into the collective self-awareness of the Turkish-speaking Ottoman Muslims.”¹⁹⁵ His poetry “was inspired by an ardent patriotism showing clearly the characteristics of nationalism,” and it “aroused sympathy in favor of national literature among the Turkish intellectuals.”¹⁹⁶

The last years of the nineteenth century also witnessed an increasing number of works on Turkish history, “aimed at arousing a national consciousness among the Ottoman Muslims.”¹⁹⁷ This included publication of more books and articles devoted to the Central Asian Turks, including histories, grammars and dictionaries. For example, just before the turn of the century Necip Asım (Yazıksız) (1861-1935) adapted Léon Cahun’s 1896 book *Introduction à l’histoire de l’Asie*, which described “the heroism of the nomad Turks of

¹⁹³ Kuran, “Impact of Nationalism,” 115.

¹⁹⁴ B. Lewis, *Emergence of Modern Turkey*, 343.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁶ Kuran, “Impact of Nationalism,” 115.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 113-4.

Central Asia,” and published it under the title *Türk Tarihi* (History of the Turks).¹⁹⁸ Bernard Lewis calls Necip Asım, who was greatly influenced by European Turcology, “the first real Turcologist in Turkey.”¹⁹⁹

There was also a renewed interest in the Turkish language towards the end of the nineteenth century, mostly involving heated discussions and controversies in the newspapers. One area of discussion was spelling, and there was a heated debate over whether the Turks should continue to write the word *Türk* as the Arabs did (ترك) or should instead be more independent and write it with the vowel (تورك).²⁰⁰

Increased censorship at the beginning of the twentieth century put an end to such historical and linguistic discussions in Istanbul, but writers in other cities continued to discuss the problem of language. For example in Izmir, Mehmet Necip (Türkçü) wrote a series of articles beginning in 1899 under the title “Türkçe Dilimiz” (Our Turkish Language), in which he suggested that spoken Turkish be used as the written language.²⁰¹ Also, “By the end of the nineteenth century some, and by the First World War most, Turkish writers were making a conscious effort to avoid Persian constructions except in stock phrases.”²⁰²

There is one further literary movement from the Hamidian period that deserves mention. That is the short-lived movement that centered around the journal *Çocuk Bahçesi* (Child’s

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 114.

¹⁹⁹ B. Lewis, *Emergence of Modern Turkey*, 348.

²⁰⁰ Öksüz, *Türkçenin Sadeleşme Tarihi*, 53.

²⁰¹ Kuran, “Impact of Nationalism,” 114-5.

²⁰² G. Lewis, *Turkish Language Reform*, 21.

Garden) in Salonica in 1905, and was a sort of precursor to the *Yeni Lisan* movement that would originate there following the 1908 revolution. As its name implies, *Çocuk Bahçesi* started out as a journal for school children, but in 1905 it began featuring works by the likes of Mehmet Emin, written in a clear and simple language.²⁰³ The content grew more political in nature and the journal was shut down by the government after it published Mehmet Emin's poem *Kayıkçı* (The Boatman), which "subtly depicted the crumbling of the Ottoman Empire under Abdul Hamid."²⁰⁴ This marked the end of the movement to simplify the language until after the 1908 revolution.

Also beginning around the turn of the century, Turkish immigrants from Russia played a part in spreading Turkism among the Ottoman Turks. In 1904, the young Yusuf Akçura (then known as Akçuraoğlu Yusuf, 1879-1935) submitted an essay entitled *Üç Tarz-ı Siyaset* ("Three Kinds of Policy" or "Three Political Ways") to *Türk*, a journal published by Turkish political exiles in Cairo. In this article, which in 1912 was reprinted as a pamphlet, Akçura examines Ottomanism, Pan-Islamism and Turkism as bases for loyalty and national identity. He concludes that, since the Ottomans are not a nation, Ottomanism is doomed to fail. As for Pan-Islamism, Akçura predicts that it will meet with too much resistance from the Christian powers. He then suggests Turkism as the basis for Ottoman loyalty, a policy that would "rally the loyalties of the dominant Turkish race within the Ottoman Empire, and reinforce it with that of the many millions of Turks, in Russia and elsewhere, beyond the Ottoman frontiers."²⁰⁵ Thus in *Üç Tarz-ı Siyaset*, Akçura promoted

²⁰³ Öksüz, *Türkçenin Sadeleşme Tarihi*, 56-7, 87.

²⁰⁴ Ernest Edmondson Ramsaur, Jr., *The Young Turks: Prelude to the Revolution of 1908* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1970), 121.

²⁰⁵ B. Lewis, *Emergence of Modern Turkey*, 327.

Pan-Turkism as a way to preserve the Ottoman state and, at the same time, as a way to transform it.²⁰⁶ This marked the beginning of the political phase in the development of Turkism, a “political Turkism”²⁰⁷ which would grow increasingly active during the second constitutional period.

²⁰⁶ François Georgeon, *Aux origines du nationalisme turc: Yusuf Akçura (1876-1935)* (Paris: Éditions ADPF, 1980), 25.

²⁰⁷ Kuran, “Impact of Nationalism,” 116.

CHAPTER THREE

THE SECOND CONSTITUTIONAL PERIOD

The 1908 Revolution

The Young Turk Revolution of 1908 brought Abdülhamit's autocracy to an end.

According to Bernard Lewis, the revolution was

a patriotic movement of Muslim Turks, mostly soldiers, whose prime objective was to remove a fumbling and incompetent ruler and replace him by a government better able to maintain and defend the Empire against the dangers that threatened it. Ottoman non-Muslims played a small and diminishing role in the movement... The fundamental question that concerned them was... the survival of the Ottoman state... and both their actions and their discussions revolved around this central problem.²⁰⁸

It was an exciting and important time, following thirty years of repression and censorship.

In the few years of freedom that followed the ending of Abdülhamid's autocracy, there was an opportunity for discussion and experiment such as the country had never known before. In a spate of periodicals and books, the basic problems of religion and nationality, of freedom and loyalty in the modern state, were discussed and examined.²⁰⁹

Abdülhamit was not actually deposed until 1909, when he was replaced with the more pliable Mehmet V Reşat (1909-1918), but the 1908 revolution marks the end of the Hamidian era. The 1876 Constitution was restored, and parliamentary elections were held

²⁰⁸ B. Lewis, *Emergence of Modern Turkey*, 212.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 213.

in November and December 1908. The voting was “honest,” and the different *millet*s were fairly represented in proportion to their population.²¹⁰ In the later years of the second constitutional period from 1913 to 1918, the real power was held by *Ittihad ve Terakki*, known in English as the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) or simply as the Young Turks.

Bernard Lewis writes that the Young Turks “followed a policy of Turkification” by trying to impose the Turkish language on the non-Turkish subjects of the empire.²¹¹ This included not only the Christians, but also the non-Turkish Muslims. According to Hasan Kayalı, this was simply part of the Unionist policy of centralization. Other languages could still be used freely in the press, in religious matters, and in primary education, and charges of Turkification came from the opponents of centralization.²¹²

In the end, the language issue served as the “catalyst which eventually brought about the final breakdown of the Muslim *millet*.”²¹³ Whereas Arab nationalism had earlier arisen mainly among Christian Arabs, following the 1908 revolution it began to affect Muslim Arabs as well. Secularist Turkish nationalism, based primarily on language and ethnicity, “had started a chain reaction which broke the unity of the Muslims by stimulating the rise of ethnic and linguistic nationalism among them.”²¹⁴

Several Islamist groups were active during the second constitutional period, including a

²¹⁰ Shaw and Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire*, 275-8.

²¹¹ B. Lewis, *Emergence of Modern Turkey*, 219.

²¹² Hasan Kayalı, *Arabs and Young Turks: Ottomanism, Arabism, and Islamism in the Ottoman Empire, 1908-1918* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1997), 209.

²¹³ Karpat, *Social Foundations of Nationalism*, 109.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 111, 116.

group led by the poet Mehmet Âkif (1870-1936). In their newspaper *Sırat-ı Müstakim* (The Straight Path), later renamed *Sebil ur-Reşat* (Fountain of Orthodoxy), these Islamists initially expressed support for the ideas of constitutional and parliamentary government, finding them in harmony with the Islamic practice of consultation (*meşveret*). However, the usual split between Islamists and Westernizers emerged when it came to issues such as adopting western institutions or granting equality to non-Muslims.²¹⁵ Islamists and Ottomanists like Mehmet Âkif warned that nationalism would mean the end of the Ottoman state, but their warnings did not influence CUP policy.²¹⁶

Beginning in 1914, the CUP actually funded a journal, *İslâm Mecmuası* (Islamic Review), which was intended to show that nationalism “was not contrary to Islam.”²¹⁷ The contributors to *İslâm Mecmuası* were scholars who had received a modern education alongside the traditional religious education. Each issue began with a passage from the Qur’ân in Arabic along with the Turkish translation, and beginning in the later issues the Turkish translation appeared alone. The journal thus was a precursor of later efforts to translate the Qur’ân into Turkish.²¹⁸

While Ottomanism remained the official policy, among the Turkish Muslims of the Ottoman state debate focused on the issue of whether they were primarily Muslims or Turks. While this debate had begun to emerge during the Hamidian era, Bernard Lewis writes that “the question of whether the Muslim community or the Turkish nation was to

²¹⁵ Shaw and Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire*, 304.

²¹⁶ Karpas, *Social Foundations of Nationalism*, 112.

²¹⁷ Arat, *Turkish Nationalism*, 83.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 86, 90.

be the basis of identity and focus of loyalty was one of the most hotly debated” issues of the Young Turk period.²¹⁹ The loss of almost all of the Ottoman territories in Europe as a result of the Balkan Wars of 1912-1913 dealt a mortal blow to Ottomanism,²²⁰ and the Arab revolt of 1916 signaled the collapse of Pan-Islamism.²²¹

Turkism and Pan-Turkism

While the last years of the nineteenth century had witnessed a rise in Turkish consciousness, it was not until after the 1908 revolution, and particularly after the Balkan Wars of 1912-1913, that more Turks began thinking of themselves as Turks or as nationalists.²²² It was also in the Young Turk period that people began to refer to the country as *Türkiye*. Earlier, the Young Ottomans had referred to it as *Türkistan*, and Mehmet Emin called it *Türkelî*.²²³

While Ottomanism was still the official policy in the Young Turk period, Turkism was on the rise. Several Turkist and Pan-Turkist organizations were founded, starting with the *Türk Derneği* (Turkish Society) in either December 1908 or January 1909. The *Türk Derneği*, which included non-Turkish Ottomans and foreign scholars among its members, was for the most part a “scholarly and cultural” organization and published a journal of

²¹⁹ B. Lewis, *Emergence of Modern Turkey*, 233.

²²⁰ Uriel Heyd, *Foundations of Turkish Nationalism: The Life and Teachings of Ziya Gökalp* (London: Luzac, 1950), 34.

²²¹ Berkes, *Development of Secularism in Turkey*, 428.

²²² Davison, “Nationalism as an Ottoman Problem,” 26.

²²³ B. Lewis, *Emergence of Modern Turkey*, 353.

the same name.²²⁴ Its members included Ahmet Midhat and Mehmet Emin, and one of the concerns of the group was the gap between the written language and the spoken language.²²⁵ On the issue of language reform, the members of *Türk Derneği* can be broken into three groups: simplifiers (*sadeleştirmeciler*), who merely favored dropping some non-Turkish elements from the language; Turkicizers (*Türkçeciler*), who wanted to create new words “by means of the regular Turkish suffixes” while keeping commonly used Arabic and Persian words; and purifiers (*tasfiyeciler*), who wanted to eliminate all foreign elements from the language and “advocated borrowing words and suffixes from other [Turkish or Turkic] dialects” to accomplish this.²²⁶ Despite these markedly different viewpoints within the group, outsiders generally referred to them all as purifiers, a fact which created some confusion.²²⁷

The *Türk Yurdu Cemiyeti* (Turkish Homeland Society) was founded in August 1911 as the successor to the *Türk Derneği*, and its leaders were Yusuf Akçura and Ahmet Ağaoğlu. The society and its journal, *Türk Yurdu*, were much more successful and influential than their predecessors. They advocated the simplification of written Turkish to better reflect the spoken language, and also worked “to promote the political and economic interests of Turks all over the world as well as those within the sultan’s dominions.”²²⁸ While the earlier *Türk Derneği* had included Turkic immigrants from Russia among its members, it was in *Türk Yurdu* that they increasingly began to express their opinions alongside those of the Ottoman Turks. For the *Türk Yurdu* journal,

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, 349.

²²⁵ Öksüz, *Türkçenin Sadeleşme Tarihi*, 60, 63.

²²⁶ G. Lewis, *Turkish Language Reform*, 19.

²²⁷ *Ibid.*

²²⁸ Shaw and Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire*, 289.

simplification of the language was for Pan-Turkist considerations, to allow it to reach as many Turkic readers as possible.²²⁹

The *Türk Yurdu Cemiyeti* was then supplanted by the *Türk Ocağı* (Turkish Hearth, commonly referred to in the plural as *Türk Ocakları*, Turkish Hearths), which was founded in 1912 and had even more material aims than its predecessors. The *Türk Ocağı* was intended

to advance the national education and raise the scientific, social, and economic level of the Turks, who are the foremost of the peoples of Islam, and to strive for the betterment of the Turkish race and language.²³⁰

It was opposed to both Ottomanism and Islamism, and instead promoted Turkish nationalism. Local branches of the *Türk Ocağı* “became adult education societies,” attempting to promote Turkish cultural awareness through education in the Turkish language and Turkish history.²³¹ According to Kemal Karpat *Türk Yurdu*, and especially the *Türk Ocakları*, “were established for the purpose of disseminating the nationalist concepts and of transforming ultimately the Ottoman Empire into a Turkish state.”²³²

The distinction between Turkism and Pan-Turkism is important. The Turkism of the Ottoman Turks generally involved “a greater awareness of their separate identity as Turks, a new feeling of kinship with their rediscovered ancestors and their remote cousins, [and] a new interest in Turkish language, folklore, and tradition,” while the Pan-Turkism prevalent particularly among Turkish immigrants from Russia, such as Yusuf

²²⁹ Arai, *Turkish Nationalism*, 48-50.

²³⁰ B. Lewis, *Emergence of Modern Turkey*, 350.

²³¹ Shaw and Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire*, 309.

²³² Kemal H. Karpat, *Turkey's Politics: The Transition to a Multi-Party System* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1959), 27.

Akçura and Ahmet Ağaoğlu, was more political and aimed at unifying all the Turks from Turkey in the west to China in the east.²³³ Pan-Turanism expanded this further to include Mongols and Hungarians, among others.

The *Yeni Lisan* Movement and Ömer Seyfeddin

There was a great deal of progress made in simplifying the language during the years of Young Turk rule. Bernard Lewis writes that

The repeated struggles for power – whether electoral, demagogic, or military – needed swift and effective use of the new mass media of information. The series of new wars in which the new régime was involved made a different but no less cogent demand for simple and accurate communication. The printing press and the telegraph both played a great part in the simplification of Turkish.²³⁴

The most important group to focus on language reform during the second constitutional period centered around the journal *Genç Kalemler* (Young Pens), which began publication in Salonica in 1911.²³⁵ Its members, also known as the *Yeni Lisancılar* for their articles advocating a “new language” (*yeni lisan*), included Ziya Gökalp (1876-1924) and Ömer Seyfeddin (1884-1920). Beginning with Seyfeddin’s famous article of the same title (“Yeni Lisan”), they criticized the *Edebiyat-ı Cedide* and the *Fecr-i Âtî* (The Coming Dawn, a sort of successor to the *Edebiyat-ı Cedide* following the 1908

²³³ B. Lewis, *Emergence of Modern Turkey*, 351.

²³⁴ *Ibid.*, 431.

²³⁵ The cover of the first issue, featuring a transliteration of the title into Latin characters as *GUAINDJ-KALEMLAIR*, is reproduced in Öksüz, *Türkçenin Sadeleşme Tarihi*, 79.

revolution) and called for a new national literature written in a new national language.²³⁶

Writing in a direct and lively style, Seyfeddin asserted unequivocally that “bringing a national literature into existence first requires a national language. The old language is sick.”²³⁷ In practically every article he wrote on the language issue, Seyfeddin emphasized that in spoken Turkish one never used Arabic or Persian particles, or compounds formed according to Arabic or Persian grammatical rules (with the exception of technical terms), or foreign plural forms, or unassimilated foreign words.²³⁸ He pushed for the use of the spoken language in literature, asserting that “Turks want to read. But they want to read things written in their own language,” not a bunch of Persian and Arabic compounds.²³⁹ According to Seyfeddin, most people no longer took the old literary language seriously. Instead, it was used to comic effect in the humor magazines of the day, with compounds formed from Turkish words using Arabic and Persian rules being particularly laughable.²⁴⁰

Seyfeddin also pointed out the difference between the *tasfiyeciler* and the *Yeni Lisancılar*. While the *tasfiyeciler* wanted to get rid of all words that were not of Turkish origin, which according to Seyfeddin would result in an artificial language full of dead Turkish words, the *Yeni Lisancılar* simply wanted to use spoken Istanbul Turkish as the literary language, keeping all foreign words which had been assimilated and become part of the

²³⁶ G. Lewis, *Turkish Language Reform*, 22.

²³⁷ Ömer Seyfettin, *Bütün Eserleri 13: Dil Konusunda Yazılar* (Ankara: Bilgi Yayınevi, 1989), 24.

²³⁸ Ibid., 34, 41, 76.

²³⁹ Ibid., 53.

²⁴⁰ Ibid., 126-7.

spoken language.²⁴¹

While the original ideological inspiration for the *Yeni Lisan* movement came more from Ziya Gökalp, much of its practical success was due to the short stories of Ömer Seyfeddin. Using a highly personal and animated language, Seyfeddin broke with tradition and created a new style. For this he has been called the “discoverer” of modern Turkish prose.²⁴² Kemal Karpat writes that Seyfeddin’s literary career

seems to have been intimately involved with the idea of using the vernacular as the language of Turkish literature. This idea was one of several that were basic to the projected language reform. Though language reform was one of the main principles of Ömer’s own nationalist philosophy, he regarded the use of a simplified language not as an ideological weapon, but as an essential condition for mass communication and national education.²⁴³

Seyfeddin wrote a total of 135 stories and was most active from 1917 until his death in 1920. In his writings, “nationalism appears essentially as a search for a national consciousness through the adoption of the vernacular, the identification of the elite with the culture of the masses, and the achievement of progress within a national state.”²⁴⁴ Seyfeddin also defended patriotism – “attachment to the land, to the people, and to the native culture – as an indispensable condition for unity and political-social integration.”²⁴⁵ With all the emphasis Seyfeddin gives to the language issue, it is not surprising that he follows Gökalp in asserting that Turkish identity is based not on race but on language,

²⁴¹ Ibid., 156-7.

²⁴² Bombaci, *Letteratura Turca*, 465, 469.

²⁴³ Kemal H. Karpat, “Social Environment and Literature: The Reflection of the Young Turk Era (1908-1918) in the Literary Work of Ömer Seyfeddin (1884-1920),” in *An Anthology of Turkish Literature*, ed. Kemal Silay (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Turkish Studies, 1996), 284.

²⁴⁴ Ibid., 284-5.

²⁴⁵ Ibid., 285.

upbringing, culture and religion. To support this argument in his Pan-Turkist political pamphlet *Yarınki Turan Devleti* (Tomorrow's Turanian State), originally published in 1914, he states that Turkism based on race is impossible since "there is no pure race left anywhere."²⁴⁶

The *Genç Kalemler* journal was closely connected to the CUP, and Ziya Gökalp was actually a member of the CUP central council. Together they set up a committee which translated many western works into the "new language," and there were plans to have it taught in schools as well.²⁴⁷ At the same time, not everyone was interested in a "new language." Many people in the literary establishment were opposed to making any changes in the language, a fact which "may have been due to their love of Ottoman for its own sake or as a badge of rank distinguishing them from the commoners."²⁴⁸ Still, C. E. Bosworth writes that by the First World War the *Yeni Lisan* movement "had largely triumphed against the opposition of conservative writers."²⁴⁹

Ziya Gökalp and Turkish Nationalism

Ziya Gökalp, a native of Diyarbakır, settled in Salonica shortly after the 1908 revolution and soon became one of the most important intellectuals of the Turkist movement. Until 1909 or 1910 he still believed in Ottomanism, though "the first signs of Turkish

²⁴⁶ Ömer Seyfeddin, *Yarınki Turan Devleti* (Istanbul: Beyazıt Matbaası, 1958), 16-7.

²⁴⁷ Arai, *Turkish Nationalism*, 44-5.

²⁴⁸ G. Lewis, *Turkish Language Reform*, 23.

²⁴⁹ C. E. Bosworth, "Language Reform and Nationalism in Modern Turkey: A Brief Conspectus (Second Installment)," *The Muslim World* 55, no. 2 (April 1965): 118.

nationalism can already be perceived in his writings of those years.²⁵⁰ Gökâlp may have been of Kurdish origin, though he denied it, and this uncertainty probably contributed to his ideas on nationality. Gökâlp stated unequivocally that “nationality is based solely on upbringing,”²⁵¹ that it is determined not by racial origin but by “education and feeling.”²⁵²

Ziya Gökâlp played an important part in the *Yeni Lisan* movement, and in fact he had been writing poetry in simple colloquial Turkish since 1909. However, he was not content to focus solely on language reform, and he began to focus more on “social reforms and... national revival in all spheres of life” and on Turkish nationalism.²⁵³ In 1912 he moved to Istanbul and joined the editorial staff of *Türk Yurdu*, which at that point was the organ of the *Türk Ocağı* club. He embraced Pan-Turkism/Pan-Turanism for a time, but he eventually “took exception to its extreme aims” and developed his own ideology of Turkism, which Uriel Heyd describes as a synthesis of Ottomanism, (Pan-)Islamism and (Pan-)Turkism/Turanism “with the emphasis on the element of nationalism.”²⁵⁴ There was also a strong Islamic element in Gökâlp’s writings, though this was not as pronounced after the Albanian and Arab revolts. Gökâlp viewed Turkey as the “last fortress of Islam,” and the Turkish national revival was supposed to bring about a Muslim revival as well.²⁵⁵ He believed that worship should be in the language of the people, in Turkish rather than Arabic.²⁵⁶

²⁵⁰ Heyd, *Foundations of Turkish Nationalism*, 32-3.

²⁵¹ Ziya Gökâlp, *Turkish Nationalism and Western Civilization: Selected Essays of Ziya Gökâlp*, trans. and ed. Niyazi Berkes (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1959), 44.

²⁵² Heyd, *Foundations of Turkish Nationalism*, 21.

²⁵³ *Ibid.*, 33.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 34, 71.

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 100.

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 102.

Ziya Gökalp continued elaborating his ideas on language until his death in 1924. He favored using Arabic and Persian to form technical and scientific terms in much the same way as the western languages use Greek and Latin to form new words for new concepts or inventions. While most of the words he coined never caught on, he is responsible for *meşkûre*, based on the Arabic *fakara* (to think) and meaning “ideal or lofty goal.”²⁵⁷ Gökalp was not averse to using the Persian *izafet* in his earlier coinages, though he later advocated abandoning all Arabic and Persian grammatical rules as well as all foreign vocabulary which had no Turkish equivalent.²⁵⁸ Thus, he would advocate using *hayatiyat* for “biology” rather than the *izafet* compound *ilm-i hayat*.²⁵⁹

Gökalp mocked anyone who deviated from Turkish linguistic mores. This included Turkists who wanted to bring back dead “fossil words” like *gözgü* (mirror), Islamists who insisted on saying *nerdubân* (ladder, in the original Persian pronunciation) instead of *merdiven* (the assimilated Turkish form of the same word), and Westernists who pronounced *Europe* in the French manner instead of saying *Avrupa*.²⁶⁰ Gökalp’s ideas on language reform can be summarized as follows: “modernization and Europeanization of the language in respect to notions, Islamization in respect of scientific terms, and Turkification in respect of all other words, and of grammar, syntax and orthography.”²⁶¹ He “explicitly demanded the preservation of the old script” as a link with other Muslim nations,²⁶² and he believed that the new national language should be based on the speech

²⁵⁷ G. Lewis, *Turkish Language Reform*, 25.

²⁵⁸ Ibid., 26.

²⁵⁹ Heyd, *Foundations of Turkish Nationalism*, 117-8.

²⁶⁰ Gökalp, *Turkish Nationalism and Western Civilization*, 178.

²⁶¹ Heyd, *Foundations of Turkish Nationalism*, 119.

²⁶² Ibid., 120-1.

of “Istanbul ladies.”²⁶³

Renewed Efforts at Script Reform

Proposals for reforming the script began to circulate again in these years, and for the first time the idea of switching to the Latin alphabet “began to be defended openly.”²⁶⁴ The possibility of adopting the Latin alphabet was “a topic of conversation among Ottoman officers during the Gallipoli campaign,” for example.²⁶⁵ And according to Erik Zürcher, “several Young Turk writers – Hüseyin Cahit (Yalçın), Abdullah Cevdet, Celâl Nuri (İleri) – ... advocated the adoption of the Latin alphabet” during this period.²⁶⁶ Islamists were opposed to using such “infidel scratchings,” but they were even more strongly opposed to the proposals of some “purist Turkists” to revive a pre-Islamic Turkish script.²⁶⁷

Some proposals for reforming the Arabic script were relatively modest in scope, similar to earlier proposals of the nineteenth century. For example, in 1909 Soysalı İsmail Suphi published an article on spelling which appeared in the journal *Servet-i Fünun*. Finding Ottoman spelling illogical, he proposed eliminating some of the forms of the Arabic characters and writing the vowels. This system became known as the *Servet-i Fünun imlâsı* (*Servet-i Fünun* spelling). The script remained connected, and while many

²⁶³ G. Lewis, *Turkish Language Reform*, 26.

²⁶⁴ Berkes, *Development of Secularism in Turkey*, 422.

²⁶⁵ G. Lewis, *Turkish Language Reform*, 29.

²⁶⁶ Erik J. Zürcher, *Turkey: A Modern History* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1993), 196.

²⁶⁷ Berkes, *Development of Secularism in Turkey*, 422.

unassimilated Arabic words were left untouched, Turkish words or words that had been assimilated to Turkish were lengthened by adding vowels and in some cases simplifying the spelling. So for example, *seneler* (years) would be written سنلر instead of سنلر , and “sultan” could be written سولتان instead of سلطان . In addition, diacritical marks could be used to differentiate between the different sounds that و could represent, but they were not at all consistent with previously proposed systems. For example, Şemseddin Sami had used ǰ to represent o, but now it was used to represent u. On the whole, the system seems to have been awkward and fairly inconsistent, and probably just made things more confusing.²⁶⁸

Other proposals for reforming the script were more radical. An idea that “somehow created greater interest despite its greater eccentricity” was to write the Arabic characters individually, in their unconnected forms, and to invent enough new characters to allow an unambiguous, phonetic representation of Turkish.²⁶⁹ In 1908 Milâşlı İsmail Hakkı devised a system of this sort, with modified forms of the three Arabic vowels to represent all eight Turkish vowels. The result was ugly and it took significantly more space than it did to write the same thing in the unmodified script.²⁷⁰ In an article which appeared in the *Türk Derneği* journal, Milâşlı İsmail Hakkı blamed the low rate of literacy on the lack of characters to represent the vowels and also on the fact that the Arabic characters were written connected in cursive form. His motive in reforming the Arabic script was to prevent the adoption of the Latin alphabet. Interestingly, he did not support the

²⁶⁸ İskit, *Türkiyede Neşriyat Hareketleri*, 145.

²⁶⁹ Berkes, *Development of Secularism in Turkey*, 423.

²⁷⁰ İskit, *Türkiyede Neşriyat Hareketleri*, 145.

simplification of the language itself, only the reform of the Arabic script.²⁷¹

In 1912 Terbiyeci İsmail Hakkı and Cihangirli M. Şinasi devised a system that modified the script almost beyond recognition. They wrote all the characters separately, altering their forms to make them all the same height, and added new or modified characters to represent the vowels. In effect, they produced a phonetic alphabet that would represent all the sounds of Turkish, but the modifications they made to the Arabic script were so extreme that it was almost unrecognizable. A 1914 effort by Gazi Muhtar Paşa's *Islah-ı Huruf Cemiyeti* (Script Reform Society) used different modified characters for the vowels, but the end result was practically identical in that it looked completely alien and would have to be learned almost from scratch.²⁷²

The Ministry of War actually used a reformed version of the Arabic script during World War I. This system was implemented in either 1913 or 1914 by Enver Paşa, who was Minister of War at the time. Enver's system was known by several different names, including *huruf-i munfasıla* (disjointed letters), *hatt-ı cedid* (new writing), *Enverpaşa yazısı* (Enver Pasha writing), and *ordu elifbası* (Army alphabet).²⁷³ In this system the final forms of the characters were all written individually, and the Arabic vowels were written individually with different diacritical marks to represent all eight Turkish vowels. Thus 'ı represented *i* while 'ı represented *ı*, and the four vowels *o*, *ö*, *u*, and *ü* were represented by 'o, 'ö, 'u, and 'ü respectively. Beyond the addition of these diacritical

²⁷¹ Arai, *Turkish Nationalism*, 14-5.

²⁷² İskit, *Türkiyede Neşriyat Hareketleri*, 331.

²⁷³ G. Lewis, *Turkish Language Reform*, 29.

marks, the characters were not modified as in the above examples but rather retained their normal recognizable shapes.²⁷⁴ This system was “intended to simplify the work of military telegraphists,” but the result was not very attractive.²⁷⁵ While it may have been an admirable attempt at reducing the possibilities for ambiguity in telegraph communication, it was also very bad timing to attempt such a change in a time of war.²⁷⁶ In 1917 Enver published a reading book (simply entitled *Elifba*) to teach his system, but the effort was abandoned by the end of the war.²⁷⁷

Andrew Mango’s critique of Enver’s alphabet can be applied to any of the proposals for reforming the Arabic script that involved separating the characters. These proposals

destroyed the main advantage of joined-up Arabic writing – the shape of the written word which could be read at a glance, while preserving letters not needed to render the sounds of Turkish. Above all, like unreformed Arabic script, it hampered intercourse between Turkey and the advanced nations which used the Latin script.²⁷⁸

As late as 1920 someone writing under the name Elifî published a work promoting the use of a slightly modified script with some new symbols introduced for the vowels, but which would be written in line and connected.²⁷⁹ However, Niyazi Berkes points out that in the end,

The more the prophets and inventors multiplied and intensified their propaganda through lectures, exhibitions, pamphlets, and demonstrations, the less the idea of improving the Arabic script appealed to the reading public.²⁸⁰

²⁷⁴ İskit, *Türkiyede Neşriyat Hareketleri*, 145-6.

²⁷⁵ G. Lewis, *Turkish Language Reform*, 29.

²⁷⁶ Berkes, *Development of Secularism in Turkey*, 423.

²⁷⁷ G. Lewis, *Turkish Language Reform*, 29.

²⁷⁸ Mango, *Atatürk*, 464.

²⁷⁹ İskit, *Türkiyede Neşriyat Hareketleri*, 331.

²⁸⁰ Berkes, *Development of Secularism in Turkey*, 422.

Much of the generation that grew to maturity in these turbulent years, that participated in the rise of Turkism and in these early efforts to reform the language, would proceed to shape the new Turkish Republic following the War of Independence.

CHAPTER FOUR

TURKISH NATIONALISM AND REFORM IN THE REPUBLIC

The War of Independence and the Establishment of the Republic

İlter Turan, a modern Turkish historian, writes that the War of Independence “was waged in the name of a political community, a nation, whose characteristics were not explicitly spelled out,”²⁸¹ with the focus rather on defeating the external enemy. It was only after the war with the establishment of the Republic that “efforts were launched to shape the population which remained within the boundaries of the state into a new political community.”²⁸²

For his contemporaries during the early days of the War of Independence “Kemal’s resistance was a religious as much as a national movement,” and “religious devotion released forces in the struggle for national survival of which a purely secular nationalism would have been incapable.”²⁸³ As Binnaz Toprak interprets it, “to fight a nationalist war

²⁸¹ İlter Turan, “Religion and Political Culture in Turkey,” in *Islam in Modern Turkey: Religion, Politics and Literature in a Secular State*, ed. Richard Tapper (London: J.B. Tauris, 1991), 37.

²⁸² Ibid.

²⁸³ Dankwart A. Rustow, “Politics and Islam in Turkey 1920-1955,” in *Islam and the West*, ed. Richard N. Frye (The Hague: Mouton, 1957), 71, 74-5.

with a peasant population which lacked any sense of national identity was a contradiction in terms,” and therefore Mustafa Kemal was forced to use religion as the only means available to mobilize the population.²⁸⁴

In April 1920, shortly after the British occupied Istanbul, the *Şeyhülislâm* Dürriyade Abdullah issued a *fetva* that denounced the nationalist resistance as “a gang of common rebels whom it was the imperative duty of any loyal Muslim to kill.”²⁸⁵ Dankwart Rustow refers to this *fetva* as “the watershed between a religious past and a secularist future,” as things would have gone very differently if the Sultan and the *Şeyhülislâm* had joined or supported the resistance.²⁸⁶ Mustafa Kemal and his closest associates had in fact been sentenced to death in absentia by a military tribunal, a sentence that Sultan Mehmet VI Vahideddin (1918-1922) confirmed in May 1920.²⁸⁷ Along with the Empire’s defeat in World War I and its subsequent dismemberment, the fact that the Sultan and the *Şeyhülislâm* discredited themselves by opposing the resistance was a major factor in giving the upper hand to the Westernists at the expense of the Islamists, who wanted to borrow only technology from the West while preserving the traditional culture. When the resistance proved successful, this gave the Westernists “their definitive opportunity to deal with the religiously based opposition to cultural transformation.”²⁸⁸

Following the success of the national resistance movement, Turkish delegations from both Ankara and Istanbul were invited to the negotiations in Lausanne, but the Grand

²⁸⁴ Toprak, *Islam and Political Development*, 62.

²⁸⁵ Rustow, “Politics and Islam in Turkey,” 75. The *Şeyhülislâm* was the highest religious authority in Istanbul. A *fetva* (Arabic *fatwā*) is simply an opinion based on Islamic law.

²⁸⁶ Ibid., 77.

²⁸⁷ Ibid., 76.

²⁸⁸ Turan, “Religion and Political Culture,” 34.

Vizier's suggestion that they send a joint delegation caused an uproar in the national assembly.²⁸⁹ The Sultan did not want to recognize that the government in Ankara had already won, and he refused to dismiss his ministers as Ankara wished. The Sultanate was then abolished on 1 November 1922. Mustafa Kemal justified abolishing the Sultanate by referring to instances in Islamic history where temporal power had been usurped, leaving an impotent Caliph. Now, he claimed, the Turkish nation had regained its own sovereignty after six centuries under the Ottoman dynasty. According to Andrew Mango, at this point it was for tactical reasons that Mustafa Kemal decided to put up with the Caliphate for a little longer.²⁹⁰

The Caliph Abdülmecit was installed as a powerless figurehead in November 1922 after the deposition of Mehmet VI Vahideddin and the abolition of the Sultanate. Following "violent discussions in the Grand National Assembly," the Caliphate too was eventually abolished in March 1924.²⁹¹ Mustafa Kemal's political opponents had tried to pit the Caliph against him, and the Caliphate was becoming the focal point of conservative opposition.²⁹² An alliance between conservative Westernizers and Islamists, centered around the Caliphate, would have stood in the way of the Kemalist reforms, so the only solution was to abolish the Caliphate.²⁹³ Mustafa Kemal also found it unacceptable that the Turks should be the only nation that both paid for the continuation of the Caliphate and remained under its influence. Pleas from two prominent Indian Muslims in support of the Caliphate also did not help matters, since they were taken as "an act of interference in

²⁸⁹ Zürcher, *Turkey: A Modern History*, 168.

²⁹⁰ Mango, *Atatürk*, 363-4, 407.

²⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 407.

²⁹² *Ibid.*, 366.

²⁹³ Feroz Ahmad, "Politics and Islam in Modern Turkey," *Middle Eastern Studies* 27, no. 1 (January 1991): 6.

Turkey's internal affairs."²⁹⁴ The abolition of the Caliphate "signaled Mustafa Kemal's determination to exclude Islam from the public domain,"²⁹⁵ and a series of other changes followed, including the closing of the religious courts and the lifting of the official ban on alcohol. It also represented a final rejection of Pan-Islamism.

The first opposition party, the Progressive Republican Party, was shut down in 1925 following the Sheikh Said rebellion in the eastern Kurdish region, and a long period of one-party rule followed. The "machinery" that was set in place to crush the Kurdish rebellion, which was simultaneously a nationalist and a religious uprising, was also used by the Kemalists to crush all opposition.²⁹⁶ The 1925 'Law for the Maintenance of Order' gave "extraordinary and, in effect, dictatorial" powers to the government, and this law was renewed in 1927 and finally allowed to expire in 1929.²⁹⁷ All of this made it easier for the Kemalists to carry out radical reforms.

The press also played a role in these years, with many journalists joining Mustafa Kemal's Republican People's Party and helping to "propagate the new Republican values."²⁹⁸ There was more criticism at first from journalists in Istanbul, which had become "a hotbed of opposition and of snide disparagement."²⁹⁹ Istanbul had lost its privileged position with the move of the capital to Ankara, and many people who had worked in the palace or the old central government now were either unemployed or had to

²⁹⁴ Mango, *Atatürk*, 397, 400.

²⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 407.

²⁹⁶ Robert Olson, *The Emergence of Kurdish Nationalism and the Sheikh Said Rebellion, 1880-1925* (Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 1989), 154, 158.

²⁹⁷ B. Lewis, *Emergence of Modern Turkey*, 266.

²⁹⁸ Metin Heper and Tanel Demirel, "The Press and the Consolidation of Democracy in Turkey," *Middle Eastern Studies* 32, no. 2 (April 1996): 120.

²⁹⁹ Mango, *Atatürk*, 392.

move to a “bleak Anatolian market town.”³⁰⁰ Mustafa Kemal eventually convinced the Istanbul press that they “should form a fortress of steel round the republic. The republic had a right to demand this from journalists.”³⁰¹ In 1925 numerous newspapers were closed in Istanbul as part of the general crackdown on the opposition, and many people stopped reading the remaining newspapers in protest.³⁰²

The New Turkish Nationalism

One of the most important issues facing the new Turkey was the question of identity, and of what the basis of loyalty to the state would be. Ottomanism had failed to keep the empire together, while Arab mutinies had challenged the idea of Pan-Islamism. Furthermore, any identification based on Ottomanism, Pan-Islamism or Pan-Turkism would not be limited to the territory that was to become the Turkish Republic. Thus it was necessary to define a more limited identity based on this territory.

Ercüment Kuran describes the development of Turkism as consisting of several distinct phases – scientific, literary, political – culminating after the establishment of the Turkish Republic in “cultural Turkism adjusted to the needs of a territorial nation-state.”³⁰³ The reforms discussed below constitute a large part of the Kemalist effort to manufacture a new national identity, based on a new national culture, suited to the new situation in the nascent Turkish Republic. It was a major task, but in many ways the stage had been set

³⁰⁰ Ibid.

³⁰¹ Ibid., 402.

³⁰² Ibid., 426.

³⁰³ Kuran, “Impact of Nationalism,” 117.

for an effort of this sort. As mentioned above, the Sultan and the *Şeyhülislâm* had earlier been discredited due to their opposition to the resistance during the War of Independence, and the Sultanate and Caliphate had subsequently been abolished. Moreover, the emergence of Turkish national sentiment at this point was helped by the fact that “during the wars in Anatolia Turkish peasants found themselves in an ‘us vs. them’ situation in their own villages,” where “Turks were forced to think of themselves as Turks and to fight as Turks” in inter-communal warfare against Greeks and Armenians.³⁰⁴

At the same time the exchange of populations between Turkey and Greece, which is usually described as an exchange of “Greek” and “Turkish” populations and thus seems to fit with the idea of ethnic nationalism, was in fact based solely on religion. According to Bernard Lewis, “Between 1923 and 1930 about a million and a quarter Greeks were sent from Turkey to Greece, and a rather smaller number of Turks from Greece to Turkey.”³⁰⁵ This included the *Karamanlīs*, Greek Orthodox Christians who for the most part knew no Greek but wrote Turkish using the Greek alphabet, as well as Muslims from Greece who did not know Turkish but wrote Greek using the Arabic script. In effect, Christian Turks were deported to Greece and Muslim Greeks were deported to Turkey.³⁰⁶

The creation of the Turkish Republic also had serious implications for the minority groups who still lived inside its borders, and particularly for the Kurds. The new international border cut through the traditional pasture area of Kurdish tribes. The Kurds

³⁰⁴ Justin McCarthy, “Foundations of the Turkish Republic: Social and Economic Change,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 19, no. 2 (April 1983): 146.

³⁰⁵ B. Lewis, *Emergence of Modern Turkey*, 354.

³⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 354-5.

continued trading across the newly drawn borders of the Turkish Republic, and this “smuggling” activity was a challenge to the Turkish project of nation building. The government increasingly tried to suppress Kurdish identity in 1924, and the abolition of the Caliphate “removed an important religious symbol” that had bound Turks and Kurds together.³⁰⁷ The Sheikh Said rebellion of 1925 led to increased suppression, and in 1926 “the ministry of education decreed that ethnic names such as Kurd, Laz or Circassian should not be used, as they harmed Turkish unity.”³⁰⁸ In the end “the consolidation of the Turkish state and of Turkish nationalism were greatly expedited by the suppression and perceived threat of Kurdish nationalism.”³⁰⁹

The Kemalists promoted Turkish nationalism not only through the ruling Republican People’s Party and the various branches of government, but also through the press, the schools, and the *Türk Ocağı* organization. It was an inward-looking nationalism, in sharp contrast with irredentist Pan-Turkism as well as with the earlier emphasis on foreign affairs and on learning foreign languages, and was self-centered to such a degree that until World War II the new generation “viewed the world largely in terms of its relationship to Turkey.”³¹⁰

³⁰⁷ Zürcher, *Turkey: A Modern History*, 177-8.

³⁰⁸ Mango, *Atatürk*, 428.

³⁰⁹ Olson, *Emergence of Kurdish Nationalism*, 160.

³¹⁰ Shaw and Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire*, 375-8. Also see Karpat, *Turkey's Politics* for more on *Türk Ocağı* in the Republican era.

The Early Kemalist Reforms

Many of the reforms enacted under Mustafa Kemal had also been advocated by intellectuals of the late Ottoman period. At the same time, many of the reforms that were now carried out were quite radical, especially when judged by the standards of the previous decade. Important reforms that were carried out in the 1920s include the abolition of the religious *şeriat* courts in April 1924 and the eventual adoption of a modified version of the Swiss civil code in 1926, the banning of the *tarikats* (religious brotherhoods) in November 1925, and the abolition of the office of *Şeyhülislâm* in 1924. The Presidency for Religious Affairs (*Diyanet İşleri Reisliği*) and the Directorate-General of Pious Foundations (*Evkaf Umum Müdürlüğü*) were established in 1924, giving the state control over all religious matters.³¹¹

Another vital area of reform was education, and the Unification of Education law of 1924

was not only a rejection of the traditionalism of the medreses, but it also put an end to the pluralism of minority schools, missionary schools and foreign schools and thereby asserted a centralist, modernist, national educational system under the guidance of rationalism and scientism, to establish a new nation with a new identity, and a new unified morality.”³¹²

One of the most talked-about reforms was the 1925 Hat Law. A law of 25 November 1925 outlawed the fez and required men to wear western hats. The fez had been introduced as the headgear of the Ottoman army in 1828, and had met with resistance at

³¹¹ B. Lewis, *Emergence of Modern Turkey*, 272, 411, 413.

³¹² Bahattin Akşit, “Islamic Education in Turkey: Medrese Reform in Late Ottoman Times and Imam-Hatip Schools in the Republic,” in *Islam in Modern Turkey: Religion, Politics and Literature in a Secular State*, ed. Richard Tapper (London: I.B. Tauris, 1991), 161.

the time.³¹³ Now attempts to abolish it met with resistance, resistance which was harshly dealt with under the 'Law for the Maintenance of Order' which had been passed to deal with the Kurdish rebellion of the same year. Mustafa Kemal continually stressed that the western hat was the civilized headgear, and though he also attacked the veil, he stopped short of actually outlawing it.

In April 1928 the reference to Islam as the state religion was deleted from the constitution, completing the process of legal and constitutional secularization in Turkey. However, the Arabic script remained as a "potent and universal" symbol of Turkey's attachment to the Islamic world.³¹⁴

The success of the reforms has been attributed to the changes in the Turkish population, economy, and society that resulted from the wars of 1912-1922. These changes were due to massive mortality in Anatolia, as well as to increased migration and urbanization. According to this view, the devastation of a decade of wars made the population of Anatolia and Thrace more likely to accept change and to view it as beneficial, a fact that explains both the success and the speed of the reforms under Mustafa Kemal.³¹⁵

The reforms were implemented from above by the Kemalist elite. Much has been made of their radical nature and of the transformation that took place in Turkish society. Yet as Erik Zürcher points out:

³¹³ B. Lewis, *Emergence of Modern Turkey*, 101.

³¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 276.

³¹⁵ McCarthy, "Foundations of the Turkish Republic," 139.

The reforms hardly influenced the life of the villagers who made up the great mass of the Turkish population. A farmer or shepherd from Anatolia had never worn a fez, so he wasn't especially bothered about its abolition. His wife wore no veil anyway, so the fact that its use was discouraged did not mean anything to him or her. He could not read or write, so the nature of the script was immaterial to him. He had to take a family name in 1934, but the whole village would continue to use first names...³¹⁶

Although reforms such as the Hat Law and the adoption of the Latin alphabet "had little to do with accepted indices of modernization, they were considered essential to the Kemalist program of reform because they gave momentum to the basic aim of the [Kemalist] revolution, i.e., to transform Turkish society from an Islamic into a Western setting."³¹⁷

Adoption of the Latin Alphabet

Proposals to switch to the Latin alphabet were discussed in 1923 and 1924, but were "decisively rejected."³¹⁸ There was opposition to changing the alphabet in "conservative and religious circles," but the opposition had been effectively silenced in 1925.³¹⁹

Since French was still the European language of choice, "it was generally assumed that a new Latin alphabet would involve applying French orthography to Turkish words," and this was one of the reasons why some people were opposed to the idea of switching.³²⁰ Not only would it require more letters to write the same word, it's just plain ugly. For

³¹⁶ Zürcher, *Turkey: A Modern History*, 202.

³¹⁷ Toprak, *Islam and Political Development*, 39.

³¹⁸ B. Lewis, *Emergence of Modern Turkey*, 277.

³¹⁹ Zürcher, *Turkey: A Modern History*, 196.

³²⁰ G. Lewis, *Turkish Language Reform*, 31.

example, *çocuk* (child, using modern Turkish spelling) would be written *tchodjouk*, and *cevap* (answer) would be *djévabe*.³²¹

Then in 1926 the Soviets introduced modified Latin alphabets for the Turkic languages of Central Asia. This helped strengthen support for the adoption of the Latin alphabet in Turkey, and exiles from Azerbaijan were actively involved in pushing for the switch. However once the Latin alphabet was adopted in Turkey the Soviets imposed the Cyrillic alphabet on the Central Asian Turks.³²² This was ostensibly done because the Cyrillic had more letters than the Latin alphabet and thus would require fewer diacritical marks. However, it is interesting to note that “identical sounds in closely related Turkic languages were often represented by different graphemes while identical graphemes sometimes represented totally dissimilar sounds,”³²³ which could only serve to hamper communication among the different Turkic groups. At the same time, both of the Soviet switches were probably intended to keep the Turks of the Soviet Union cut off from Turkey.³²⁴ On a similar note, the Greeks encouraged the Turkish minority that remained in Greek Thrace to continue using the Arabic script.³²⁵

One of the main arguments concerning the unsuitability of the Arabic script for the Turkish language is that it makes for too much ambiguity. As noted above, the representation of vowels was considered a major problem, particularly the four vowels

³²¹ *Ibid.*

³²² B. Lewis, *Emergence of Modern Turkey*, 432.

³²³ Paul M. Austin, “Russian Loanwords in the Proposed Reform of Soviet Turkic Alphabets,” *General Linguistics* 13, no. 1 (Spring 1973): 17. Following the switch to Cyrillic, these languages increasingly borrowed vocabulary from Russian. This led to problems similar to those experienced by the Ottoman and Republican Turks in deciding how to write Arabic words (19-25).

³²⁴ B. Lewis, *Emergence of Modern Turkey*, 432.

³²⁵ Bosworth, “Language Reform,” 119.

that were represented by و (when it was written at all). However, the problem went beyond just the vowels. To take an example from Geoffrey Lewis, كل (kl) in an Ottoman text had eight possible readings, including Turkish *gel* (come) and *kel* (scabby), Arabic *kül* (all) and Persian *gül* (rose). In cases like this, a good knowledge of Arabic and Persian vocabulary was important in figuring out which reading was intended in a particular context. The ambiguity that arose from writing Turkish words in the Arabic script, where for example اولدی can be read either *oldu* (he became) or *öldü* (he died), led people to use Arabic synonyms or circumlocutions when writing.³²⁶ At the same time, it should be pointed out that implementing any one of the earlier, more modest reform proposals would have solved much of the problem. In the first example given above, half of the problem could be solved simply by consistent use of the Persian گ to represent *g*. In the second example, a small diacritical mark would eliminate any ambiguity.

On May 20, 1928 the international numerals were adopted, and three days later the *Dil Encümeni* (Language Commission) was established. It was immediately split into two commissions, one to look at the question of the alphabet and one for grammar. The modified Latin alphabet that was adopted in place of the Arabic script was the result of six weeks of work by the Alphabet Commission under the direction of Mustafa Kemal himself.³²⁷

The Commission “rejected in principal the idea of a transliteration alphabet, because they did not wish Arabic and Persian pronunciations... to be perpetuated; they wanted them

³²⁶ G. Lewis, *Turkish Language Reform*, 27-8.

³²⁷ *Ibid.*, 32-3.

assimilated to Istanbul speech patterns.”³²⁸ Thus, for example, there is no way to represent the difference between Arabic *ص* and *س*, as they both become *s* in the new alphabet. *ع* and *غ*, which were only ever pronounced by people who knew Arabic, are not represented at all. A partial exception to the rule is the inclusion in the new alphabet of *ğ* (*yumuşak ge* or “soft *g*”), which was designed to replace both *غ* and also *ك* when it was pronounced like *y*, as in *değil* (written *دكل*, *dki* in the old script).³²⁹ The writing of foreign words as they are pronounced in Turkish was by no means limited to Arabic borrowings, leading to inconsistencies.³³⁰ One could even argue that phonetic spellings of foreign words like *miting* (meeting, demonstration) and *kontrendikasyon* (French *contre-indication*),³³¹ even extending to proper names like *Fransua* (François), serve to hamper communication with other nations just as the reformed or unreformed Arabic script did. The new alphabet is very simple and easy to learn, but it can be very confusing to someone who does not know it.

According to one account, *q* almost came to be used instead of *k* in certain cases. Mustafa Kemal’s rejection of *q* is reportedly due to the fact that he did not know how to write the capital forms of the Latin letters, so he would simply make the lower-case form larger. He compared *qemal* to *kemal* and chose the latter, not being aware that he could also write it *Qemal*. There were some minor inconsistencies in the new alphabet, like the fact that a

³²⁸ Ibid., 33.

³²⁹ Ibid., 36.

³³⁰ Mango, *Atatürk*, 465.

³³¹ All drugs sold in Turkey come with a small slip of paper that gives detailed information on the proper dosage (*dozaj*), on the drug’s pharmacological properties (*farmakoloji*), and on any contraindications (for example, “Do not use if you are pregnant.”). Much of the medical vocabulary used is French, written phonetically in the Turkish alphabet.

circumflex could be used to indicate either a long vowel (in foreign words) or the palatalization of the preceding consonant.³³² But in the end, what the Commission finally settled on is an excellent example of a phonetic alphabet, where (unlike in French or English) there is a nearly perfect one-to-one correspondence between the letters and the actual sounds of the language.

While other members of the Alphabet Commission proposed to bring the new alphabet into use gradually, using it side by side with the old for a period of either five or fifteen years, Mustafa Kemal wished to see it put into use almost immediately. Once the new alphabet was ready, he “introduced it to the vast crowds attending a Republican People’s Party gala in Gülhane Park on the evening of 9 August 1928.”³³³ The choice of venue was significant, as it was in the very same park that the *Tanzimat* charter, the *Hatt-ı Şerif* of Gülhane, had been proclaimed almost a century before in 1839. The large mass of happy party-goers must also have made for a more receptive audience than would a serious gathering of intellectuals. Andrew Mango writes that “resistance to the Latin alphabet was naturally strongest in the educated élite. But the population, which the first census held in 1927 put at 13,650,000, was largely illiterate. Most Turks thus first learnt to read in the new Latin alphabet.”³³⁴

Newspapers began using the new alphabet for their headlines in August 1928. “The Public Press then began to prepare the new letters to be used in publications, and, on

³³² G. Lewis, *Turkish Language Reform*, 34, 36.

³³³ *Ibid.*, 34.

³³⁴ Mango, *Atatürk*, 466.

August 26th 1928, distributed copies of the new alphabet to members of Parliament.”³³⁵ By October 29, when the Language Commission wrapped up work on a new dictionary of 25,000 words, “all the necessary measures had been taken to prepare the ground for modifying Turkish publishing activities.”³³⁶ The law implementing the new alphabet was passed on November 1, 1928. Newspapers were printed in the Arabic script for the last time on November 30, 1928, and starting in January 1929 all book publishers had to use the new alphabet.³³⁷ Lord Kinross writes that “there was chaos for a while in the schools, where the teachers had to teach an alphabet they didn’t yet know, with text-books that hadn’t yet been printed.”³³⁸ Publishers’ concerns about books they had already printed with the old script were met with assurances that the government would help compensate their losses.³³⁹ Citizens were required to use the new alphabet in all correspondence with the government beginning June 1, 1929, while it was permissible to use the old script “in official and private records as shorthand” until June 1, 1930.³⁴⁰ It was made “strictly illegal” to print anything in the old script, other than for scholarly purposes.³⁴¹

According to government figures compiled by Jale Baysal, the change of alphabet “did not lead to any stagnation” in book publishing, and publishing activity gradually increased over the following decade from about one thousand books a year to nearly three

³³⁵ Baysal, “Turkish Publishing,” 115.

³³⁶ Ibid.

³³⁷ Ibid.

³³⁸ Lord Kinross, “Atatürk and His Achievement,” *Journal of the Royal Central Asian Society* 51 (1964): 21.

³³⁹ Baysal, “Turkish Publishing,” 115. Baysal does not give any information on whether compensation was actually given.

³⁴⁰ G. Lewis, *Turkish Language Reform*, 38.

³⁴¹ Bosworth, “Language Reform,” 119.

thousand a year in the late 1930s.³⁴² However, newspaper circulations decreased immediately following the switch, and the government stepped in with monthly subsidies to help them survive the transition. In the first week of December 1928, the circulation of the leading *Cumhuriyet* newspaper fell from 9,000 to 5,730 copies, and the American ambassador reported that many Turks who knew French began reading the French newspapers which were published in Istanbul at the time.³⁴³

As has been noted above, the difficulty of learning and using the Arabic script for the Turkish language was often given as a reason for why alphabet reform was necessary, with the low level of literacy in the Ottoman Empire being attributed to this difficulty. It is common to attribute the rising rate of literacy in the Republic to the new alphabet, though there are disagreements on this point. Erik Zürcher describes the new alphabet's effect on the literacy rate as "disappointing,"³⁴⁴ while Geoffrey Lewis writes that it "has played a large part in the rise of literacy."³⁴⁵ The literacy rate was very low to begin with, and has risen as follows:

1924	9%
1927	10.6%
1935	20.4%
1945	30.2%
1950	34.6%
1975	65%
1995	82.3% ³⁴⁶

³⁴² Baysal, "Turkish Publishing," 119, 130.

³⁴³ Şimşir, *Türk Yazı Devrimi*, 226-7.

³⁴⁴ Zürcher, *Turkey: A Modern History*, 197.

³⁴⁵ G. Lewis, *Turkish Language Reform*, 37.

³⁴⁶ The literacy rates are taken from B. Lewis, *Emergence of Modern Turkey*, 310-1 and from G. Lewis, *Turkish Language Reform*, 37. Bernard Lewis notes that the overall rate in 1950 can be broken down with higher rates among men and "the under sixteens" and significantly lower rates in villages.

It is important to note, however, that the alphabet change was immediately followed by a drive to increase the rate of literacy. "All over Turkey 'national schools' [*millet mektepleri*] were opened to teach reading and writing in the new alphabet. By 1936, when their functions were transferred to the new People's Houses, they had issued 2,500,000 diplomas of literacy. The literacy rate doubled from 10 to 20 per cent in a population which had by that time increased to over 16 million."³⁴⁷ Thus it would seem that most of the increase might in fact be due to the efforts of the 'national schools', and not to the new alphabet. Binnaz Toprak writes that "the enforcement of state-sponsored universal education through the primary grades since 1930 probably accounts for much of the improvement rather than the alphabet reform *per se*."³⁴⁸

In the end, adopting the new alphabet was a way "to cut off Turkish society from its Ottoman and Middle Eastern Islamic traditions and to reorientate it towards the west"³⁴⁹ and "to destroy a cultural symbol,"³⁵⁰ and was thus ideologically motivated. At the same time Mustafa Kemal made sure to refer to it as the "Turkish" alphabet, and "the script of the infidel Franks thus became the alphabet of patriotic, nationalist Turks."³⁵¹

Turkish in Worship

In 1928 a committee of the new Theological Faculty at Istanbul University made several

³⁴⁷ Mango, *Atatürk*, 466-7.

³⁴⁸ Toprak, *Islam and Political Development*, 41.

³⁴⁹ Zürcher, *Turkey: A Modern History*, 197.

³⁵⁰ Toprak, *Islam and Political Development*, 41.

³⁵¹ Mango, *Ataturk*, 465.

recommendations to the Ministry of Education concerning the place of religion in Turkish society. The only “practical consequences” to come out of the committee’s recommendations involved the “Turkicization of worship,”³⁵² meaning specifically that prayers and recitations of the Qur’ān in the mosques should be offered in Turkish rather than in Arabic. This came amidst other related religious and educational reforms. For example, in 1929 secondary school instruction in Arabic and Persian was abolished.³⁵³

In January 1932, parts of the Qur’ān were for the first time recited in Turkish in an Istanbul mosque.³⁵⁴ There was much opposition to using Turkish in mosque services, but the government pushed ahead on using Turkish for the *ezan*, or call to prayer. In 1932 it was heard in Turkish for the first time, and in March 1933 the Presidency of Religious Affairs issued an order which “superseded, though without actually banning, the call to prayer in Arabic.”³⁵⁵ This was merely an “administrative ordinance,” not an actual law, and it would seem the government felt that was as far as it was safe to go at the time.³⁵⁶ The Linguistic Society published a version in “pure” Turkish, and a new Turkish melody was prepared.³⁵⁷ In 1940 it was made mandatory to use Turkish for the call to prayer,³⁵⁸ and in 1941 the penalties for violation of this ordinance or of the Hat Law were increased.³⁵⁹

According to Dankwart Rustow, “it seems that this one act of government interference in

³⁵² B. Lewis, *Emergence of Modern Turkey*, 414-5.

³⁵³ Ibid., 415.

³⁵⁴ Mango, *Atatürk*, 497.

³⁵⁵ B. Lewis, *Emergence of Modern Turkey*, 415-6.

³⁵⁶ Mango, *Atatürk*, 498.

³⁵⁷ B. Lewis, *Emergence of Modern Turkey*, 416.

³⁵⁸ Feroz Ahmad, “Islamic Reassertion in Turkey,” *Third World Quarterly* 10, no. 2 (April 1988): 755.

³⁵⁹ Rustow, “Politics and Islam in Turkey,” 89.

the ritual caused more widespread popular resentment than any of the other secularist measures.”³⁶⁰ In February 1933 there was a protest in Bursa against the Turkish *ezan*, and worshippers who protested were arrested and labeled reactionaries.³⁶¹ Parliament lifted the prohibition on the Arabic call to prayer immediately following the victory of the Democrat Party in the 1950 election,³⁶² but the controversy lived on.³⁶³

The Turkish Historical Society

In 1930, a committee of the Turkish Hearths was set up and given “the task of writing a history centred on the Turks,” but in 1931 the job was instead given to the newly-formed Turkish Historical Society.³⁶⁴ The Turkish Historical Society (*Türk Tarih Kurumu*, originally *Türk Tarihi Tetkik Cemiyeti*) was founded to help “destroy what remained of the Islamic and Ottoman feelings of loyalty, to counter the distractions of pan-Islamic and pan-Turkist appeals, and to forge a new loyalty” to the Anatolian homeland.³⁶⁵ It was supposed to show that “the Turks had a historic right to their land, had created great civilizations, and were capable of contributing to the one, universal, modern civilization.”³⁶⁶

According to Şerif Mardin, the National History Thesis

³⁶⁰ Ibid., 84.

³⁶¹ Mango, *Atatürk*, 497.

³⁶² Ahmad, “Politics and Islam,” 10.

³⁶³ Mango, *Atatürk*, 497.

³⁶⁴ Ibid., 493.

³⁶⁵ B. Lewis, *Emergence of Modern Turkey*, 358-9.

³⁶⁶ Mango, *Atatürk*, 493.

was built on the idea that Turks had contributed to civilisation long before they had been incorporated into the Ottoman empire. They had originated an urban civilisation in Central Asia from which many other civilisations had sprung. They had maintained their cultural identity even after becoming a minority in a multi-national empire. It was from this fund that an identity could be drawn for the citizens of republican Turkey. To a limited extent this thesis achieved its goal; Turks began to feel a new sense of their accomplishments as Turks, and pride in being a Turk did indeed develop whereas only five decades earlier the term Turk was still used as a synonym of nomad or peasant by denizens of the Ottoman empire.³⁶⁷

The early theories put forth by the Turkish Historical Society were a mixture of fact and fiction, but the claims that, for example, the Sumerians and Hittites were Turkic peoples, were meant to give the Turks a sense of pride in their history and a feeling of attachment to the land in Anatolia. The work of the Turkish Historical Society went hand-in-hand with that of the Turkish Linguistic Society, which worked to reshape the language along purely Turkish lines and developed dubious theories of its own. This work on language and history was at the heart of the Kemalist effort to propagate the new Turkish identity, and the effects of the language reform in particular have been both enduring and controversial.

³⁶⁷ Şerif Mardin, "Religion and Secularism in Turkey," in *Atatürk: Founder of a Modern State*, ed. Ali Kazancığil and Ergun Özbudun (London: C. Hurst, 1981), 211.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE TURKISH LINGUISTIC SOCIETY AND LANGUAGE REFORM

The Political Situation in the 1930s

In March 1929 the 'Law for the Maintenance of Order' was allowed to expire, and towards the end of 1929 criticisms of the government began to appear in the newspapers and were dealt with in an unusually mild manner. The following year there was another attempt to set up a loyal opposition party, the Free Republican Party, which resulted in riots that demonstrated the "accumulated hatreds and resentments" towards the Kemalists.³⁶⁸ The unexpected results of this second experiment with democracy prompted the Kemalists to shut down the Free Republican Party as well as the other newly-formed opposition parties.

Also, in the 1930s the Kemalists placed a much greater emphasis on secularism. This followed an incident that took place in the town of Menemen in December 1930. A certain Derviş Mehmet was leading a small group of protesters in demanding the

³⁶⁸ B. Lewis, *Emergence of Modern Turkey*, 279-81.

restoration of the Caliphate and of the *şeriat*. A young reserve officer named Kubilay, who was sent with a few men to stop the demonstration and arrest the demonstrators, was beheaded by Derviş Mehmet and his head was paraded about the town. The failure of the Free Party experiment and the incident in Menemen made the Kemalists aware of the fact that the earlier secularizing reforms had not taken root among the masses, and rather than attempt to reform Turkish Islam, “it was decided that nationalism would be used as a substitute for religion.”³⁶⁹ The “pure Turkish” of the Turkish Linguistic Society was, along with the work of the Turkish Historical Society, an important part of this effort to promote Turkish identity and Turkish nationalism.

The Language Reform

Following the switch to the Latin alphabet, there was a push for further reform of the language itself. In 1920, the new government in Ankara had asked schoolteachers to collect pure Turkish words, and this was taken up again in 1929 by the *Dil Encümeni*.³⁷⁰ Serious language reform then began in 1932 with the founding of the Turkish Linguistic Society (*Türk Dil Kurumu*, originally *Türk Dili Tetkik Cemiyeti*) on July 12 of that year. What followed was a radical attempt to cleanse the Turkish language of Arabic and Persian vocabulary, known in Turkish as the *Dil Devrimi* (The Language Revolution). A project of this nature was sure to provoke strong reactions; Geoffrey Lewis, for example, would prefer to follow the Turkish terminology and refer to the people who carried it out as “linguistic revolutionaries,” since the word “reform” generally implies a change for the

³⁶⁹ Ahmad, “Politics and Islam,” 7-8.

³⁷⁰ G. Lewis, *Turkish Language Reform*, 45.

better.³⁷¹

The new Turkish Language Society was headed by the purifiers (the *tasfiyeciler*, soon changed to the pure Turkish term *özleştirmeçiler*), and one of their first projects was to produce a list of Turkish technical terms for use in the schools. This initial effort actually included a number of “long-established” Arabic words, as well as some Greek and Latin words.³⁷²

The First Turkish Language Congress (*Birinci Türk Dili Kurultayı*) was held from September 26 to October 5, 1932 at Dolmabahçe Palace in Istanbul. One of the papers presented at the first *Kurultay* made the claim that “Turkish is an Indo-European Language,” and the later *Kurultays* would witness a growing number of such enthusiastic pseudo-scientific claims.³⁷³

Following the first *Kurultay*, there was a “mobilization” to collect Turkish words in use by the people. Instruction booklets and submission slips were distributed to “army officers, teachers, tax, agriculture, and forestry officials, and government doctors, whose duties brought them into regular contact with the people.”³⁷⁴ A total of over 35,000 words was collected in this way in less than a year, after the elimination of duplicate submissions. Also, from March to July 1933 the newspaper *Hakimiyet-i Milliye* (National Sovereignty) began publishing lists of Arabic and Persian words and asking its readers to

³⁷¹ Ibid., 2.

³⁷² Ibid., 46.

³⁷³ Ibid., 47.

³⁷⁴ Ibid., 49.

suggest Turkish replacements for these words. However, only 640 acceptable submissions were collected in this way. A more serious effort at word collection was carried out by a group of scholars who combed through old texts and Turkic dictionaries and compiled a list of nearly 90,000 words. The results of all this research were then published in 1934 under the title *Tarama Dergisi*. Long lists of possible replacements were given for some Arabic and Persian words, “and for a while Babel set in.”³⁷⁵ For example, twenty-seven words were given as replacements for *hediye* (gift) and people felt free to pick their favorite word from the list, some of the possibilities being *açı*, *ertül*, *tanşu*, *yarlığuş*, and *zını*.³⁷⁶

In the spring of 1935 newspapers published lists of possible replacements for Arabic and Persian words, asking the readers to comment on them. The results were published later that year in the hastily-prepared *Cep Kılavuzu* (Pocket Guide from Ottoman to Turkish). The *Cep Kılavuzu* contained mistakes that arose from misreadings of old texts, mistakes that have now become part of the Turkish language. For example, the new word *eğitim* (education) “was supposed to be a noun derived from an ancient verb *eğitmek* ‘to educate’. But there never was a verb *eğitmek*; it was a misreading of *igidmek* ‘to feed (people or animals)’.”³⁷⁷ While the goal of the reform was to eliminate Arabic and Persian words, it does not seem that European loanwords were of great concern to the reformers, and in fact the Society at times promoted loans such as *teori* (*théorie*) to replace Arabic words.³⁷⁸

³⁷⁵ Ibid., 50.

³⁷⁶ Ibid.

³⁷⁷ Ibid., 55.

³⁷⁸ Bosworth, “Language Reform,” 124.

Many of the words created by the reformers were composed of a strange mix of elements from different languages. For example *ödev* (obligation) is formed by adding the Kazakh infinitive ending *-v* to the stem of the Turkish verb *ödemek* (to pay). The result then looks suspiciously similar to the French *devoir*. Words like *uzman* (expert) and *öğretmen* (teacher) were inspired by *vatman* (tram-driver), a word which was originally borrowed from French (*wattman*) and is actually a compound of the English words “watt” and “man.” Thus an English word ended up becoming an active suffix in modern Turkish.³⁷⁹

One new suffix in particular has contributed to changing the structure of the Turkish language. This is the adjectival suffix *-sel/-sal*, inspired by the French suffix of words such as *culturel* and *principal* and meant to serve as a replacement for the Arabic suffix *-ī* (written *-î* in Turkish). Thus, for example, *siyasî* (political) became *siyasal*. The catch is that Turkish generally has no need for an adjectival suffix of this sort, since nouns can be used as qualifiers. Thus “literary criticism” used to be *edebiyat tenkidi*, literally “criticism of literature.” A new way to say this using new Turkish words with the new adjectival suffix would be *yazınsal eleştiri*, “which is a direct translation of ‘literary criticism’ but to a literate Turk does not convey criticism of literature but criticism which is literary.”³⁸⁰

Other words created by the reformers simply were not formed according to the rules of the language, but many of them caught on anyway. An example of this sort is the commonly-used word *ilginç* (interesting). The word *ilgi* appeared in the *Cep Kılavuzu* as

³⁷⁹ G. Lewis, *Turkish Language Reform*, 95, 100-1.

³⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 101-5.

a replacement for the Arabic *alâka* (interest), and is properly formed from the verb *ilmek* (to tie loosely). The suffix *-nç* is normally attached only to verb stems, so the proper form for “interesting” would be *ilinç*. However this form never caught on, while the “linguistically monstrous” *ilginç* did.³⁸¹

The most active period for the Turkish Linguistic Society and for language reform were the years from 1932 to 1950. After Atatürk’s death in 1938, the language reform was intensified under İsmet İnönü, with his “personal blessing.”³⁸² The reform slowed down considerably following the victory of the Democrat Party in the 1950 elections. The new government stopped funding the Turkish Linguistic Society in 1951, leaving it to fend for itself with the funds left to it by Atatürk at his death along with the proceeds from its publications. However the reform continued in the 1960s and 1970s, until finally in 1983 the Turkish Linguistic Society was “reconstituted... as part of a new Atatürk Kültür, Dil ve Tarih Yüksek Kurumu (Atatürk Cultural, Linguistic, and Historical Institute)” and placed under new management.³⁸³

Opinions on the language reform vary widely, and while it has provoked much resentment over the years it also has strong supporters. The actual results of the reform are mixed. At the height of the reform, texts written in the “pure” Turkish of the Turkish Linguistic Society were just as unintelligible to the ordinary person as was Ottoman Turkish.³⁸⁴ By the mid 1930s, the outcome of the reform was basically “a private

³⁸¹ Ibid., 117.

³⁸² Rustow, “Politics and Islam in Turkey,” 90.

³⁸³ G. Lewis, *Turkish Language Reform*, 156, 162.

³⁸⁴ B. Lewis, *Emergence of Modern Turkey*, 435.

language, at least as remote from everyday usage as high Ottoman Turkish.”³⁸⁵ Still, while earlier an illiterate Ottoman subject “could not hope to understand a normal written text even if it were read aloud to him,” for the most part the written language has been brought much closer to the spoken language.³⁸⁶

The Turkish language reform may actually have inspired a similar, though more moderate and limited, movement in Iran. C. E. Bosworth writes that “it is very likely that Rizā Shāh had in mind the example of the Turkish Linguistic Society when there was founded under his patronage in 1935 a Persian Academy, the *Farhangistān-i Irān*.”³⁸⁷ This had been preceded by a movement where writers like Ahmād Kasravī advocated the use of “pure” Persian words instead of Arabic loanwords, making it necessary to include glossaries at the end of their books. The Academy encouraged writers to use a “clear, simple, Persian style” and also worked on modern technical terms.³⁸⁸

Both the National History Thesis and the “Pure Turkish” of the Turkish Linguistic Society “were designed to exclude the entire Islamic period from the nation’s historical consciousness.”³⁸⁹ Binnaz Toprak explains the role of the language reform in Turkey’s cultural transformation as an instance of “symbolic secularization” –

The easiest cultural symbol to identify is, of course, language. Through language, men express their shared experiences over time. Hence, it has a dimension of historical continuity. An induced change in linguistic patterns, therefore, entails a change in the continuity of an historical

³⁸⁵ Mango, *Atatürk*, 495.

³⁸⁶ B. Lewis, *Emergence of Modern Turkey*, 436.

³⁸⁷ Bosworth, “Language Reform,” 122.

³⁸⁸ Ibid.

³⁸⁹ Rustow, “Politics and Islam in Turkey,” 85.

tradition.... The Kemalist language reform had a similar aim of breaking the continuity of the Ottoman-Islamic tradition in Turkish society.³⁹⁰

Looking at the alphabet reform and the later language reform individually, the former was meant to cut the Turks off from their Ottoman-Islamic history and “create a nation of forgetters,” while the latter was meant to replace the rejected Ottoman-Islamic past with a new emphasis on pre-Islamic Turkish history.³⁹¹ The creation of a new national identity partly depended on “meaningful references to a common historical heritage,” and this was the purpose of both the National History Thesis and the language reform.³⁹²

The Sun-Language Theory

The Sun-Language Theory (*Güneş-Dil Teorisi*) originated with a paper by a Dr. Hermann F. Kvergić of Vienna entitled “La Psychologie de quelques éléments des langues turques,” a copy of which was sent to Atatürk in 1935. The main theme of the paper, as summarized by Geoffrey Lewis, was that

man first realized his own identity when he conceived the idea of establishing what the external objects surrounding him were. Language first consisted of gestures, to which some significant sounds were then added. Kvergić saw evidence for his view in the Turkish pronouns. *M* indicates oneself, as in *men*, the ancient form of *ben* ‘I’, and *elim* ‘my hand’. *N* indicates what is near oneself, as in *sen* ‘you’ and *elin* ‘your hand’. *Z* indicates a broader area, as in *biz* ‘we’ and *siz* ‘you’. Further, Kvergić considered that Turkish was the first human language to take shape. Nothing could have been more timely.³⁹³

³⁹⁰ Toprak, *Islam and Political Development*, 40-1.

³⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 42.

³⁹² *Ibid.*

³⁹³ G. Lewis, *Turkish Language Reform*, 57.

Atatürk and the members of the Turkish Linguistic Society then developed the Sun-Language Theory using the ideas that Kvergić presented in his paper as a starting point. According to the Sun-Language Theory, the origin of language can be traced to the moment when man first looked up at the sun and said “Aa!” This primitive exclamation, spelled *ağ* in Turkish, “was the first-degree radical of the Turkish language. Its original meaning was sun, then sunlight, warmth, fire, height, bigness, power, God, master, motion, time, distance, life, colour, water, earth, voice.”³⁹⁴ Radicals of this sort were then combined to form words, and this sort of analysis was used to “prove” that many foreign words were actually Turkish. For example, *likid* (liquid) was supposed to be formed from the radicals *yg-il-ik-id-ēy*, where *yg* means “hard” and “*il* is the suffix removing it to infinity, i.e. annihilating it. (*İlik* (‘marrow’) is Turkish, meaning a thing which is not hard.)”³⁹⁵ Atatürk concluded, based on the Sun-Language theory, that the Turks were “the originators of language,” and if all other languages were ultimately derived from Turkish, then the Turks were simply “getting their own back” in borrowing words from other languages.³⁹⁶

Much of the third Turkish Linguistic Society Kurultay in 1936 was devoted to the Sun-Language Theory. The foreign linguists in attendance “damned the Sun-Language Theory with their silence,” and it was eventually “laid to rest quietly” after Atatürk died.³⁹⁷ However, as Geoffrey Lewis points out, the people who were responsible for the Sun-

³⁹⁴ Ibid., 57-8.

³⁹⁵ Ibid., 63.

³⁹⁶ Mango, *Atatürk*, 496.

³⁹⁷ Ibid.

Language Theory and “who unblushingly delivered themselves of such drivel in public” were the very same officers of the Turkish Linguistic Society who also were responsible for the creation of *Öztürkçe*, the new “Pure Turkish,” and this “helps to explain why so much of it violates the rules of the language.”³⁹⁸

Binnaz Toprak describes the Sun-Language Theory as “an interesting attempt to find a theoretical framework for the seemingly incompatible twin goals of the Turkish revolution: the amalgam of nationalism with Westernization.”³⁹⁹ And Dankwart Rustow writes that, with the National History Thesis and the Sun-Language Theory, Kemalism “provided psychological compensations which eased the process of Westernization” by restoring Turkish self-respect.⁴⁰⁰

While the Sun-Language Theory was relatively short-lived, the effects of the language reform itself were both very broad and, for the most part, permanent. The Turks are still dealing with the consequences of the engineering that was done to both their language and to their identity. And while the effects of all this engineering were quite far-reaching, there are still important instances of continuity with the past in several areas.

³⁹⁸ G. Lewis, *Turkish Language Reform*, 63.

³⁹⁹ Toprak, *Islam and Political Development*, 42.

⁴⁰⁰ Rustow, “Politics and Islam in Turkey,” 81.

CHAPTER SIX

LATER DEVELOPMENTS

Ottoman Continuity in the Turkish Republic

While the Kemalist revolution wrought many changes in Turkish society, it was not able to completely erase the Ottoman-Islamic past and replace it with something entirely new.

As Kemal Karpat puts it,

Despite the republican leaders' contention that Turkey was a "new" country that had nothing to do with the Ottoman Empire and its history, the truth is that the Republic is heir to Ottoman cultural, strategic, historical, and religious legacies, both negative and positive, and these have haunted the country's culture, its policies, and its people to a much greater degree than its leaders' prescription for the Republic.⁴⁰¹

While the new Turkish identity in the Republic was supposed to be based solely on secular Anatolian Turkish nationalism, actual government practice in the areas of citizenship and immigration policy provides evidence to the contrary. Feroz Ahmad, for example, points out that "in theory, though not in practice, citizenship based on territory

⁴⁰¹ Kemal H. Karpat, "Turkish Foreign Policy: Some Introductory Remarks," in *Turkish Foreign Policy: Recent Developments*, ed. Kemal H. Karpat (Madison, Wisconsin: n.p., 1996), 1.

became more important than shared religion.”⁴⁰² However, religious identity actually plays an unofficial role in immigration policy. In admitting immigrants and refugees, the Turkish Republic officially focuses on Turkish language and ethnicity, but “the actual practice reveals a striking preference for admitting immigrants with a Sunni and Hanefi religious background.”⁴⁰³ According to Kemal Karpat, in the early years of the Republic “Albanians were restricted from migrating to Turkey” because “they had developed a strong nationalism of their own and therefore appeared unassimilable. The Albanians already living in Turkey, however, were considered Turks.”⁴⁰⁴

As İtler Turan explains it, the Republicans built “a political community of Turks who were also Muslims... It may be that Islam is an indispensable element in the definition of a Turk.”⁴⁰⁵ As noted above, many of the Kemalist reforms had a limited effect in the countryside, and the attempt to use nationalism as a replacement for Islam in Turkish identity met with limited success. According to Binnaz Toprak,

The state, by its secular policies and its program of Westernization, had threatened the dominant value system of a traditional Islamic society without providing, at the same time, a new ideological framework which could have mass appeal.⁴⁰⁶

On a similar note, Stanford Shaw and Ezel Kural Shaw write of how

An entire generation of Muslim Turks was deprived of any education in the values of their religion except that provided sporadically by parents and a few *hocas*. Nationalism commanded the spiritual commitment once reserved to religion but was unable to provide the spiritual solace and philosophical comprehensiveness provided by Islam.⁴⁰⁷

⁴⁰² Ahmad, “Islamic Reassertion,” 754.

⁴⁰³ Kemal Kirişçi, “Disaggregating Turkish Citizenship and Immigration Practices,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 36, no. 3 (July 2000): 3.

⁴⁰⁴ Karpat, *Turkey's Politics*, 95.

⁴⁰⁵ Turan, “Religion and Political Culture,” 40.

⁴⁰⁶ Toprak, *Islam and Political Development*, 70.

⁴⁰⁷ Shaw and Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire*, 388.

Along with the persistence of Islamic identity, there was also a resurgence of Pan-Turkism in the Republic. Andrew Mango writes of how the Turkish schools taught that “Islam was an incident in Turkish history and the multinational nature of the Ottoman empire an aberration. The proposition that the Turks were *second to none* led to the claim that they were better than anyone else.”⁴⁰⁸ In sharp contrast with the ideas of Gökaltıp and Seyfeddin, Pan-Turkism later took on strong racist overtones. And while for example Yusuf Akçura’s early Pan-Turkism was for the most part socially and culturally progressive, later Pan-Turkism in the Republic became more right-wing and conservative, as well as being vehemently anti-communist.⁴⁰⁹

On the subject of the study of history, the earlier complete rejection of the Ottoman-Islamic past has slowly given way to a renewed interest in Ottoman history. According to Kemal Karpat, as early as the 1950s “Ottoman history gradually received greater attention in schools, and its interpretation was less biased than in the first twenty-five years of Republicanism.”⁴¹⁰ However, the situation is fairly different when it comes to the Turkish language.

The Turkish Language

In the 1950s, Howard Reed observed the existence of unauthorized traditional religious

⁴⁰⁸ Mango, *Atatürk*, 494.

⁴⁰⁹ Georgeon, *Origines du nationalisme turc*, 4.

⁴¹⁰ Karpat, *Turkey’s Politics*, 258.

instruction in villages, “illegal courses which consist of little more than rote memorization of a few Quranic passages, and the attempted mastery of the rudiments of the Arabic alphabet in order to peruse religious texts in the revered original script, which still has an almost charmed significance to many simple villagers.”⁴¹¹ However, the Latin alphabet has faced no serious challenges in Turkey. A resolution was introduced at the 1951 Democrat Party convention in Konya to bring back the Arabic script and the *seriat*, among other things,⁴¹² but such isolated events have had no real effect.

Feroz Ahmad notes the later tendency of Islamists to use words of Arabic origin rather than using the new vocabulary of the language reform, though he takes care not to exaggerate the significance of this tendency. People may find this appealing simply because they are uncomfortable with the new vocabulary; they may not even realize that the familiar old words are Arabic in origin.⁴¹³ What’s more, most attempts at reversing the language reform and using unreformed Turkish inadvertently include words created by the Turkish Linguistic Society that have become part of everyday Turkish.⁴¹⁴

The most persistent problem created by the language reform is that it can sometimes be very difficult to find the right words to use in modern Turkish. Sometimes Ottoman words were eliminated without finding a suitable replacement, or else the newly-created replacement seems awkward or seems to have the wrong shade of meaning. Geoffrey Lewis gives the example of a speaker who, uncomfortable with the Arabic *küllî* or the

⁴¹¹ Howard A. Reed, “The Religious Life of Modern Turkish Muslims,” in *Islam and the West*, ed. Richard N. Frye (The Hague: Mouton, 1957), 123.

⁴¹² Karpat, *Turkey’s Politics*, 287.

⁴¹³ Ahmad, “Politics and Islam,” 14.

⁴¹⁴ G. Lewis, *Turkish Language Reform*, 161.

neologisms *tümel* and *evrensel*, instead used the French equivalent *üniversal*.⁴¹⁵

To this day, “total consistency has not been achieved in written Turkish.”⁴¹⁶ However, now that the purist Turkish Linguistic Society is a thing of the past the Turkish language has begun to settle down and develop in a more natural manner.

⁴¹⁵ [ibid., 4.

⁴¹⁶ Mango, *Atatürk*, 465.

CONCLUSIONS

In the nineteenth century, the rise of nationalist sentiment among the non-Turkish subjects of the Ottoman Empire and increasing European interference in Ottoman internal affairs led to a series of reforms (the *Tanzimat*) and to a search for a basis of identity that would instill loyalty among the various subject peoples of the empire. Ottomanism, or loyalty to the Ottoman state based on an Ottoman identity that transcended religious and ethnic divisions, would remain the official state policy until the end of the empire. However, Ottomanism did not succeed in stopping the nationalist movements, and under Abdülhamit II there was an increased emphasis on Islamism as well, both to promote solidarity among his Muslim subjects and to use as a potential threat in dealing with the European powers. At the same time, the rapid growth of Turkish publishing activities in the form of newspapers, novels and so on in the nineteenth century, along with the spread of modern secular education, a rising (though still very low) literacy rate, and an increased interest in Turcology, led to a greater awareness of Turkish identity among the Ottoman Turks. This sometimes took the form of Pan-Turkism, which ultimately aimed to unite all the Turkic peoples into one political unit. The emphasis on Turkish identity would grow even stronger as most of the remaining minorities gained their independence in the early twentieth century, until finally a territorially-based Turkish nationalism would become the official basis of identity in the new Turkish Republic. But despite the best

efforts of the Kemalists to replace Islam with nationalism, the old Ottoman-Islamic identity remained among much of the population, and Pan-Turkism also re-emerged as a force in Turkish politics.

The story of Turkish language reform is closely linked to the story of Turkish nationalism. First of all, a modern literary Turkish gradually developed over the course of the nineteenth century as newspapers became more widespread, western literary forms were adopted, and a growing number of people received a modern education and became accustomed to reading. At the same time, there were lively debates among the intellectuals on linguistic issues. Issues addressed included suggestions for reforming the script to better suit the Turkish language, arguments over whether the language should be referred to as “Ottoman” or as “Turkish,” and proposals for cleansing the language of the more unwieldy Arabic and Persian grammatical elements that it had adopted over the centuries. By the end of the century, a literary language had emerged that was very different from the earlier court language. Just as the Young Turk period witnessed the real beginnings of Turkish nationalism, it also witnessed more serious efforts at reforming both the script and the language itself. As with Turkish nationalism, the story of Turkish language reform culminates in the radical changes made in the early years of the Turkish Republic. The switch to a new “Turkish” alphabet based on the Latin characters in 1928 represented a break with the Islamic past and a shift towards the West, while the later reforms to the language itself, mainly the cleansing of a large portion of its Arabic and Persian vocabulary and expressions, were a further step in breaking with the Ottoman and Islamic past and emphasizing Turkish identity.

The only reason of any importance for reforming the language in such a radical manner, including the switch to the new alphabet, was ideological. The reforms were meant to reinforce the new Westernized Turkish nationalist identity at the expense of the old Ottoman-Islamic identity. Some degree of reform to both the script and the language was necessary to make Turkish into a modern language, more independent of Arabic and Persian, suitable for modern literary, scientific and official purposes, and accessible to the masses. However, if history had taken a different course this still could have been achieved simply by adopting one of the more moderate proposals for reforming the Arabic script and following the ideas of Ziya Gökalp and Ömer Seyfeddin in reforming the language itself. In the end, the question of whether the reforms had a positive or negative impact on Turkish society comes down to the question of whether it was worth making such a severe break with the past in order to promote the new Westernized Turkish nationalist identity, and this is a question the Turks are still grappling with today.

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