

Introduction

Over the last fifteen or twenty years, the Turkic world has undergone a host of remarkable changes of various shapes and size. Thus in Turkey – for many years the only independent Turkic state – slowly but steadily a process of transformation towards a more open and civil society has taken place. The aim to become a full member of the European Union has been a more or less powerful motor for internal changes, e.g., in the juridical and educational systems of Turkey. At least some parts of Turkish society have become more and more adapted to what one may call world civilization. At the same time, the country has had to face a wave of re-Islamization. However, even Islamist groups in Turkey have taken part in the processes of modernization and globalization. This transformation has not only affected ways of thinking and interpreting the world, it has also changed, for example, personal tastes and patterns of consumption. This globalization can also be felt in contemporary Turkish literature, the most prominent exponent of which is without doubt Orhan Pamuk. One may debate whether the general attitude towards non-Muslim citizens in Turkey has changed much, but what one can see is that these groups have become a topic in contemporary literature – and that the non-Muslims of Turkey are in the process of developing a new self consciousness. At the same time, the Turkish communities in Europe are also exhibiting many changes in their attitudes and behaviours, which should be investigated.

In the Turkic world outside Turkey the most radical change occurred with the dissolution of the Soviet Union. With the breakdown of one of the last colonial empires, new independent Turkic states appeared on the map: Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kirgizstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. Other Turkic peoples were able to preserve or gain a (more or less) autonomous status as regions within independent states, e.g. the Tatars, Bashkirs, Khakas, Tyva, Yakut, etc. Of course, gaining independence is always a crucial time for a people. Thus we find a great variety of nation building and identity creating activities – many of them following the same nationalist and sometimes chauvinist lines known from Europe and Turkey. For the first time, the non-Muslim Turks of Siberia and the Christian Gagauz of Moldova (and Bulgaria) have been noticed by a broader public in the West – some of them, the Tyva, because of their throat singing, some of them, the Gagauz, because they follow ancient but never forgotten trails to Istanbul to work there (as do many other Turks from outside Turkey who come to Turkey to work, do business, and study). Other Turkic peoples, like the Siberian Shors, are still only known to experts but have undergone many interesting cultural developments during recent years. The same holds true for the Turks of Iran, most of whom belong to the Oghuz subgroup of Turks; but one group, the Khalaj Turks, speak one of the most archaic Turkic languages. All the Turkic groups of Iran,

however, suffer from the cultural policy of the Iranian state. The Turks of China still remain in relative isolation. Their most numerous group, the (Modern) Uyghurs, are subject to increasing pressure from the central government. It will be interesting to observe the effects of the not only political but increasingly also cultural oppression of this minority on their relations with and their attitude towards the Chinese. But there are also other Turks in China, e.g. the Salars in Qinghai. Even if they live in a relatively remote area, their culture has not remained untouched by, e.g., Chinese and Tibetan influences.

Taking into account all of these interesting developments, Arus Yumul (Bilgi Üniversitesi İstanbul), Ildiko Beller-Hann (Orientwissenschaftliches Zentrum Halle), and Claus Schönig (Orient-Institut İstanbul) felt the need to bring together scholars working in different fields of Turkic studies to exchange our data, experiences, and impressions connected with the cultural changes in the Turkic world. Thus, on 6-7 December 2003 an international workshop entitled „Cultural Changes in the Turkic World“ was held at Bilgi University in İstanbul. Scholars from different countries gave lectures on topics, most of which – among other things – illustrate the great variety of changes in the Turkic world and their outcomes. Thank you very much, dear colleagues! Most of the papers given at the workshop are published in this book. It is our hope that others who are interested in different aspects of Turkic culture may profit from it.

Most of the organizational work for the workshop was done by Arus Yumul and Barbara Pusch (Orient-Institut İstanbul). Work on this publication was done mainly by Filiz Kiral (Orient-Institut İstanbul), Arus Yumul, and Barbara Pusch. Vanessa Karam was responsible for English language proofreading. Ildiko Beller-Hann was so kind to read and discuss all the circulars, invitations and papers I needed to write in order to bring together the participants and raise funds. We all extend our thanks to the Fritz Thyssen Stiftung, which financially supported our workshop.

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