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## AN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS STUDY: TURKS IN THE WESTERN WORLD'S HISTORY PERSPECTIVE AND ATATURK'S APPROACH

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### ABSTRACT

*Atatürk started numerous revolutions immediately after the war of independence, also called the struggle for national independence. The works conducted were about the content rather than the form. He desired the Turkish nation to take its rightful place among the world's nations. While building the foundations of the newly established state, on the one hand, he was making great efforts to improve the country's prestige and position abroad. At the beginning of the 20th century, the Western world treated the entire Eastern world, naturally to Turks, as second-class people and expressed this attitude on any occasion. Mustafa Kemal, who knew this case very well, decided to conduct comprehensive historical studies to achieve the following objectives: to refuse the accusations that were attributed to the Turks, which sometimes reached the level of insult; to introduce the true identity of the Turkish nation to the world; to get rid of the understanding of chronological history and to switch to the conception of social history in the country. At the end of the studies, a "Turkish History Thesis" was put forward. It was revealed that Turkish history was not limited to Islamic or Ottoman history. There was a pre-Islamic Turkish history with numerous achievements as many as post-Islamic history. Stating that history was not just the chronology, Atatürk gave the task of revealing the human aspect of history to Turkish historians in line with a study plan aiming to reveal the culture and civilization of Turkish history.*

**Keywords:** International relations, Atatürk, Turkish history, Leadership.

### INTRODUCTION

According to the official Turkish History, Turkish history begins in 400s BC, and the ancestors of Turks are nomads living in the desert according to this understanding of history. They do not have a specific culture, and such a culture cannot have a place in the universal culture. The Turks learned writing in the 700s AD, and they used letters of runic origin. Turks arrived in Anatolia in 1071 AD. We repeatedly read all these mistakes because the scientists of Western Civilization misled the Turks, made history research according to their interests, and tried to relocate the Turks to Central Asia. The languages they use in their research studies are Latin, Greek, and Sanskrit. Unfortunately, Turkish scientists are deceived by the western world since they are educated within this framework. Western Civilization is actually in a hurry to not finding its origin (Mirşan, 2011; Bilgili, 2019).

Ignoring the Proto-Turkish Civilization, the western world mentioned the Proto-Turkish inscription as belonging to a lost civilization. However, the Proto-Turkish Inscriptions read by

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Kazım Mirşan revealed the truth about Proto-Turkish History. Thus, it facilitated learning the Central Asian Turkish History until the 14000s BC. In 15000 (fifteen thousand) BC, rock art on the walls of the caves changed and became symbols (Petroglyph) in Central Asia. Then, the era of rock art with writing elements started. Central Asian Turks named these symbols "Tamga." These objects were tried to be transcribed and read in various languages; however, they could not be read until Kazım Mirşan read them in Turkish. As a result, reading these stone-age Tamgas in Turkish proved that even the language and writing symbols in the stone age in Central Asia are Turkish. Europe, which faces Turkish as they uncover history, gets surprised and tries to expel us scientifically from Anatolia and Asia. All the Tamgas in the inscriptions, rock arts, and the objects from the Kurgans in Central Asia, the number of which is expressed in hundreds of thousands today, are in Proto-Turkish (Mirşan, 2011; Çora, 2016) Approximately 3000 of these inscriptions were found in Europe, and Kazım Mirşan read about 300. The inscriptions are in Spain, France, Switzerland, Italy, and Greece. The Futhark alphabet found in Sweden and Norway is completely similar to the Gokturk inscriptions. The ancient Lycian script was used only in the Teke peninsula when the Lycians came to Anatolia (4000 BC), and the Proto-Turkish Tamga symbols are the same. There are about 400 of these inscriptions here. European historians have been still trying to read these inscriptions in their languages and are not successful. Because these inscriptions are in Turkish, they need to know today's Turkish and Anatolian Turkish Dialects and Central Asian Turkish Dialects to read them. It is impossible to read these inscriptions without knowing Kyrgyz, Tatar, and Uighur in particular. Moreover, the inscriptions were written by mathematical formulas (Çora, 2016) Some Ottoman intellectuals were influenced by the idea of nationalism since the beginning of the second half of the 19th century. According to these intellectuals, the state's salvation could have been achieved by bringing the Turks, the primary group it relied on, to the fore in each field. According to them, Turkism should have been adopted and implemented. Because it was only the Turks who fulfilled the task assigned to them and fought in the battles compared to other nations under the rule of the state (Doğan, 1994; Behar, 1996). Therefore, the Turks (Nuri, 2021), who were underrated and not taken into consideration until then, should have been assigned to the positions they deserved in state institutions. Although these thoughts sometimes came to the agenda, they could not be practiced as long as the Ottoman State continued (Çora, 2016; Ortaylı, 2016).

The Turkish intellectuals had to make a new assessment when the Ottoman Empire was defeated from the First World War, to which it went with great hope. Because the call to jihad, from which so much was expected, did not work at all, and the state lost vast land, it just caused Great Britain to be a little worried. This event symbolized the end of the psychological superiority of the Ottoman Empire and its ruling caliph in the Islamic world. The last Ottoman Chamber of Deputies (Meclis-i Mebusân), which gathered under the pressure of developing events and the Struggle for National Independence in Anatolia, declared the places where the Turkish population was the majority as "homeland" and the objective to be achieved as the "national borders." This attitude was a significant political and intellectual transformation. Until that day, the state, which regarded itself as an empire, demarcated a national border and foresaw saving those lands and not going further (Arsel, 2015).



*Assertions by the Western Historians**Assertions of Turks being from the Yellow Race*

At the end of the new age in Europe, people worldwide were subjected to various classifications regarding superior intelligence and mental deficiency. According to the assertors, the smartest race was the white race. It was followed by the members of the yellow, black, and red races. The research studies on this subject asserted that the Turks belonged to the yellow race. The Turks' belonging to the yellow race meant that they had a mental deficiency. Since no comprehensive anthropological study was carried out until the Republican era, no scientists responded to this claim. Several Turkish authors who referenced the works of the western historians also argued that the Turks belonged to the yellow race (Atay, 1980; Aysal, 2020)

Afet Inan's expressed her ideas about the subject as follows: In 1928, in one of the French geography books, it was written that the Turkish race belonged to the yellow race and was a secondary type of human being according to the European mentality. I showed it to him. Is that so? I asked him. "No, it can't be the case; let's study this issue. They said I should have worked (Çora, 2019) To reject all these misunderstandings and accusations; comprehensive investigations were started to identify the racial group the Turks belonged to (Kara, 1988). Atatürk announced the preliminary results of his extensive historical research studies in his speech at the Turkish Hearths Congress in 1930. Right after this event, the Turkish Historical Research Society was established on April 15, 1931 (Akozan, 1988). In 1937, it was proved by Afet Inan that the Turkish race belonged to the white race by making the most comprehensive head measurement ever made on this issue (Pittard, 1939). However, Western historians have not given up claiming that Turks belong to the yellow race even today, even though their studies and theses have been refuted many times (Cahen, 1984).

*Negative Thoughts about Turks*

The anthropological assertions were not sufficient to explain that Turks were far from civilized development. The gap left by anthropology was filled by Adam Smith, who was highly appreciated and recognized by western historians and politicians. Smith asserted that human history went through four stages: hunting, livestock, agriculture, and trade. He stated that Black African and North American natives were in the hunting stage, Central Asian peoples were in the nomadic stage, and most of the Eastern world was in the agriculture stage. He acknowledged that only Western Europe was in the fourth and final stage. According to Smith's assertions, all world regions, except for Europe, were considered devoid of civilization. Western Civilization took action to bring civilization to the rest of the world and colonized the world in exchange for civilization (Ortaylı, 2016).

According to this assertion, Turks were included in either the second or third group. Therefore, the civilization had to be introduced and taught to the Turks and the Ottomans, constituting the Turkish state. The western world advanced in line with this thought until the 1920s, but it did not achieve the success it desired against the Turkish nation. According to Braudel's rightful establishment, only Turkey defeated this common destiny. The sudden and bright



response of Mustafa Kemal both led to independence and set an example for other Islamic countries (Fontana, 1995; Braudel, 1996).

In addition to the assertions above, several psychological factors also led to negative judgments about Turks. Several travelers who traveled around the Ottoman lands mentioned the evil and barbarism of the Turks. Their thoughts were widely adopted by their nations and led to the perception of Turks being "barbarian, ignorant, rude" people in the public opinion of the western world (Gölen, 1998). For example, French traveler Volney, who traveled to Egypt at the end of the 18th century, saw no harm in writing clearly that Egypt and Egyptians should have been saved from the bully and cruel Turks (Işık, 2019). According to Cahen, this hatred was that the Ottomans fought against Europe and threatened Christianity much more than any other eastern nation.

This establishment of Cahen was stated in the preface of high school history coursebooks prepared in the republic's first years. In the introduction part of the work, it was referred to the negative results of the long struggle by mentioning "With a sense of hostility caused by Islam-Christianity cases that lasted more than 1000 years, the fanatical historians fought in these cases to show the history of Turks, who had been leading Islam for centuries, consists of blood and fire adventures..." (Özer, 2021). As a result of this long and backbreaking struggle, anything related to Turkishness has become a bully, evil and disgusting concept that puts pressure on Christians (Cahen, 1984; Karal, 1988). The idea of the western intellectual in the new age and modern age did not change in the 20th century. The postcards. printed in France during the Balkan wars reflect the crusader mentality. When the British army came to Gallipoli to fight, their ideas were just the same as in the previous century (Kul, 2019). Representing the dynamism of Islam for centuries, the Turks were identified with aggression.

Nevertheless, the Christian world has been fed with grudge and vengeance. According to Christians, "The Turks are inferior-class people who forcibly subdued the Christian nations and lacked any kinds of civic qualities and skills, and bring evil where their horses step; they are the enemy of civilization, source of evil; and they do not have a place among the civilized nations." British prime minister Gladstone could not refrain from saying, "There is only one way to remove the evil of the Turks over the world, which is to remove their bodies from the world." After World War I, the attitude towards the Turkish nation has been the result of these ideas that have been fed for centuries (Baykal, 1971; Çora, 2019).

In addition to these assertions, western researchers considered the Turks and Mongols the same until the end of the first half of the 20th century. Western researchers regarded the Turks and Mongols as members of the same race because they considered both nations members of the yellow race. As a result of this idea, the Turks were blamed for all the massacres made by the Mongols (Baykal, 1971). Turks were shown as vampires and enemies of civilization. Although the people who suffered from and were most affected by the Mongol massacres were Turks, they were regarded as killers who killed their nations by the Westerners. However, the Westerners were neither exposed to those massacres nor met the Mongols. They could do nothing but just get scared by terrible news from the east. Because the Mongols never crossed beyond Central Europe. Mustafa Kemal requested a response to these assertions and attacks. Therefore, the first issue addressed by the historians of the Republican era was to prove that the Turks and Mongols were separate races (Özbudun, 2021).



*Claims on Anatolia*

The source of the claims on Anatolia started in 1071 with the opening of the gates of Anatolia to the Turks. The Turks first captured Anatolia, then Thrace, the Balkans, and all of Central Europe. Especially the fears that started with the conquest of Istanbul by the Turks hit the top with the siege of Vienna. For the Western World, the Turks became a force that must have been stopped. The Western World used this opportunity in 1683 after the defeat in the second siege of Vienna. (Coşkun, 2019).

The victory in 1683 was not an ordinary military success against the Turks. Success against the Turks was the Eastern Question's most important link, one of which has survived today. According to the plan prepared within the Eastern Question, the Turks would first be expelled from Europe. From the Balkans, Istanbul would be captured, the auld Byzantine would be re-established, and then the Turks would be expelled from all over Anatolia and sent to Central Asia. They tried to implement this plan at each opportunity and put it into practice without compromise (Kodaman, 1987; Topçubaşı, 2000).

One part of the Eastern Question is the establishment of the Greek state. The newly established state immediately began to claim Anatolia and Istanbul. The Greeks used history in their claims on Anatolia and claimed to be the cultural heirs of ancient Greeks and Byzantium. Greeks were also supported by the research studies carried out in the Western World. Since there was no institution investigating the ancient Anatolian civilizations, Turkey could not respond properly to the claims of the Greeks (Kili, 2007; Şirin, 2021).

Therefore, ancient Anatolian civilizations have been researched, and important achievements have been made since the republic's first years. The second nation, which had claims on Anatolia after the Greeks, was the Armenians. Armenians claimed that the Eastern Anatolia Region had its territory, and they put forward some historical evidence to prove this (Lewis, 1991). Both Greeks and Armenians wanted to conclude their words with the Treaty of Sevres to achieve their goals. However, they could not achieve their goals due to the struggle for the independence of the Turkish nation. On the contrary, Anatolia is a Turkish homeland and will remain so has been acknowledged in Lausanne by all the world (Merçil, 1999).

*The Requirement of Creating National Consciousness and National History*

There was a national border of the Republic of Turkey. However, it was not possible to mention a national mentality in the majority of the people. The concept of nation in the Ottoman Empire corresponded to religious communities and had no ethnic significance. It was necessary to give a national identity to the nation that just came out of wars, lived in the empire until that time, defined himself with his religion before his nationality, and to tell that Anatolia was the homeland and the conquest mentality of the past was abandoned.

This new situation could be best explained to the public using history. Therefore, history was undertaken to make the people adopt and recognize a unitary structure based on the Turkish national foundation. To understand how difficult this function was, it is enough to see what the intellectuals of the period understood from the concepts of empire and national state. Regarding the issue, Falih Rifki wrote: "When they captured Belgrade from us, enemy delegates also asked for the town of Nis. The Ottoman delegate stood up and said: "Who needs it; let us also give Istanbul to you. For our fathers, Nis was so close to Istanbul. We thought that the



Turkish nation could not survive if we left Vardar, Tripoli, Crete, and Madinah." When he has these ideas about the country's shrinking, he uses stricter expressions about national consciousness and nationalism. He states that even the Arabs gained the consciousness of Arabness before the Turks, but the Turks still lacked this consciousness. His ideas on the Ottoman State are as follows: "The art of empires is to process colonization and nationality. The Ottoman Empire, from Thrace to Erzurum, lay its huge body on its side, handed the breasts to the mouth of the colonies and nationalities, and it was a milch whose milk was sucked together with its blood (Atay, 1980; Ortaylı, 2021). "As it was seen, he complains that the state was a kind of colony. The same is true for the Balkans. At the beginning of the 20th century, many Turks were fascinated by Albanian nationalism and described themselves as Albanians (Bakiler, 1996). The late Ottoman intellectuals, who personally witnessed these developments, considered it was required to provide consciousness of nationalism to the public. All minorities in the state achieved their independence by gaining national consciousness. The Turks, on the other hand, described themselves as Muslims and did not mention their nationality. It was urgently necessary to demolish this ummatist understanding and establish the Turkish identity (Avcıoğlu, 2006).

#### *Insufficiency of Pre-Republic Research Studies on History*

Historiography was just daily records of the events before the republic, and there was no comment or criticism in this type of journal. The cause-effect relationship was not established, no comments were made, the events were not criticized, and the references were not shown. The works were written in a style of reporting/storytelling (Çınar, 2021).

Both the chronicles, who were civil servants and paid by the government and the freelance historiographers, went beyond the ordinary. As well as the official historical records, the works addressing just a campaign or an event were also written using the same method. Each decision made by the rulers was praised in almost all of these works, and sometimes, even sad events were ignored by the authors.

Pre-Republic historiographers can be classified into two groups. The first group glorified the people they deemed benefactors; therefore, they ignored many negative events and did not cover them in their works. The authors in the second group consisted of those who lost political challenges among the elites. The people in this group wrote biased and dark political defamation stories to clear the way for getting the power again or at least to break the power of the winners of the political challenge. Therefore, most historical works needed to be questioned (Quataert, 1999; Abou-el-haj, 2000). In addition to the lack of methods used by the authors and their weaknesses, it is not possible to find any record of Turkish history in most of their works. The works either started with Osman, the first sultan of the Ottoman dynasty or with Ottoman history was written as a part of Islamic history. The absence of any chapter on pre-Islamic Turkish history in these works led to the impression that Turkish history was limited to Ottoman history. By the first years of the republic, there was scarcely any knowledge about Turkish history before Islam. Besides, they did not cover nationality consciousness in the historical works, but rather the ummah was covered as the basis. Mustafa Kemal believed that writing national history should be started by taking into account this great deficiency in historiography. Therefore, he focused on Pre-Islamic Turkish History, and important



achievements were made in this regard by putting forward a Turkish History Thesis (Nuri, 2021).

#### *Atatürk's Historical Research Program*

According to his statements, Mustafa Kemal's interest in history goes way back to his school years. The first word of his work titled "Ariburnu Muharebeleri Raporu" (Report of Ariburnu Battles), which covers the tasks he undertook on the front of Canakkale, is history. He stated that he had written his work to convey correct information to future generations. He frequently appealed to the testimony of history to explain his reforms to the public and the assembly and thus convinced his opponents. His interest in history and the value he attached to it emerged concretely when he was given an honorary professorship. When he would be presented with the Honorary Professor of Literature in 1923 by the decision of the Council of Professors of Literature Madrasa at Istanbul Darulfunun, he requested the certificate of the professorship in history by stating that he was more interested in history than literature (Özbudun, 2021).

Atatürk requested to respond to the following questions both to facilitate revealing the facts in a field he was interested in and to counteract the assaults on Turks, (Sarigüzel, 2021)

1. Who were the oldest indigenous peoples of Turkey?
1. How was the first civilization established in Turkey, or who brought it?
2. What is the place of Turks in world history and world civilization?
3. It is a historical legend that Turks, as a tribe, established a state in Anatolia. Therefore, another explanation is required for the establishment of this state.
4. What is the true identity of Islamic history? What was the role of Turks in Islamic history? (Coşkun, 2019)

In the foreword of the 1st Turkish History Congress, it was highlighted that Turkish historians were studying the guidelines he provided, and the answers to the above questions were sought.

As a result, the Turkish History Thesis has emerged. The Turkish History Thesis, the results of which are controversial even today, remains the most important assertion in the republican period of Turkey. Atatürk followed up the studies closely and enabled historians to benefit from all the resources of the state. He was especially interested in the excavations, which require quite much money and labor, and the findings of these excavations (İldemir, 1939; Aydın, 2019).

#### *Ataturk's Conception of History*

##### *Universal Conception of History*

According to Atatürk, history should have ensured unification in the culture of humanity, which has been derived from the same root for thousands of years, provided that it preserves the personal liberty of people and the characteristics and independence of nations. For the rise of all humanity, all humanity should have been conscious of this idea. History should have revealed brotherhood, not hostility between nations.

While working on the Balkan Entente with the Balkan Nations, he said: "It is important to remember that the Balkan Nations, regardless of their social and political aspects, have



common ancestors from close lineages from Central Asia. Masses of people came after each other following the North and South ways of the Black Sea like sea waves for thousands of years and settled in the Balkans; although they have different names, they are nothing more than brother nations from a single cradle (Peker, 1931; Nuri, 2021).

With these words, Atatürk was referring to the common history of all nations, i.e., the Turkish History Thesis. He believed that all the people in the world, separated from each other by various natural, social, and religious factors and who became enemies, could come together and establish peace provided that this idea was taken as a basis. The thoughts suggested by him are quite clear universal messages in terms of the brotherhood of all nations and the establishment of world peace. His conception of history also opposes Europe's self-centered classist obsession that considers themselves superior and belittles cultures outside Europe (Işık, 2019).

#### *According to Atatürk*

"Our ancestry, which established great states, also had large and far-reaching civilizations. It is our liability to research it, to examine it, to report it to the Turkish nation and the world."

The more Turkish children get to know their ancestors, the more power they will have to accomplish great things.

"If a nation is great, it gets even greater by getting to know itself."

"As the accomplishments of Turkish talent and power in history emerge, all the Turkish children will be able to find the motivation needed for them at that history. From this history, the Turkish children will gain the idea of independence, think of those great accomplishments, recognize the people who did wonders, think they are from the same blood; having this skill, they will not bow to anyone."

"You, the Turkish Nation! You are the honor of humanity in being a hero and a warrior and in ideas and civilization. History is full of the laudation and the encomia of the civilizations you have established. Although the political and social factors intended to end your existence have intercepted you for a few centuries and slowed down your march, the heritage of ideas and culture of ten thousand years lives as a virgin and inexhaustible power in your spirit. The history, which bears the memory of thousands and thousands of years, indicates the position that you deserve in the civilization order with its finger. Walk there and rise! This is both a right and a duty for you" (İldemir, 1939; Şirin, 2021).

Mustafa Kemal's view of national history also consists of two parts.

The first part, as explained above, aims to reveal the civilized characteristics of the Turkish nation and its services to humanity.

The second part, which can be called the Anatolian Theory, covers the studies carried out to prove that the first indigenous dwellers of Anatolia and the founders of Anatolian civilization were Turks. This theory was put forward to respond to the claims on Anatolia. For this purpose, surprising results were obtained by carrying out studies to reveal the relations and kinship of Turks with Sumerians and Etruscans. The claims of the Greeks and Armenians that Anatolia was their land were refused by evaluating the research results. The results of the studies were presented to the local scientists at the 1st Turkish History Congress in 1932 and supported by the local researchers and the invited history teachers who attended the congress.



In 1937, at the 2nd Turkish History Congress, the contributions of Turks to the world civilization and findings that Anatolia was an ancient Turkish homeland were presented to the examination of world historians and led important discussions (Taşağıl, 2018; Çınar, 2021)

## CONCLUSION

As a realistic statesman, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk was aware of the challenges and resources. He determined very well that development and the process of nationalization could not be completed without a Turkish renaissance. Therefore, in his many speeches, he emphasized that culture was the foundation of the Republic of Turkey, which was newly established. The culture was always the main element of the revolutions. Alphabet, hat, wearing revolutions were the preliminaries for the intended society (Depree, 2004).

Soon after these revolutions, scientific institutions that would implement the Turkish renaissance were established. For example, founding the Faculty of Language, History, and Geography before the Faculty of Medicine explicitly indicates the importance Mustafa Kemal attached to the social sciences. Therefore, he allocated most of his time to social science studies, and he was involved in these studies (Yenen, 2011).

In social sciences, Mustafa Kemal was more interested in language and history studies. His particular interest in history and the value he gave was of utmost importance. Atatürk always considered history a guide and expressed his ideas with the following words (59): "What a beautiful mirror is history. People, so much the more the tribes that cannot mature moral ethics, cannot prevent the feeling of stingy even in the face of the greatest sacred. In the great series of events which was covered in history, the behaviors and actions and procedures of those who were factors and actors of these events show their moral characteristics".

"In my opinion, the important attention and revival lessons that people can learn from history should be the results of the examination of the causes and factors for the establishment of states, usually the political institutions, modification like these institutions and the dissolution and abolition of them."

*"History can never deny the blood, right, and the existence of a nation."*

His conception of history contributed to world peace and led to the emergence of the Turkish national presence, which was his great work. He introduced the Turkish national presence and identity to the whole world and procured its acceptance. He read and used historical information and gained historical knowledge to find and correct the mistakes and deficiencies in the results of the historians' studies. He proved the value he attached to history by establishing the Turkish Historical Society to carry out historical research studies. He not only established this organization and but also provided the necessary financing for its survival in the future (Püren, 2020).

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