

# Introduction:

## The Past as Resource in the Turkic Speaking World

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Memory studies have enjoyed enormous popularity over the last decade or so, during which important theoretical advances have been supplemented by countless empirical case studies. The purpose of this volume is not to recycle or to replicate what has been said before but to draw attention to the importance of memory, and by extension to the ways in which history has been perceived and instrumentalised, within the Turkic speaking world. In doing so, we wish to contribute to attempts to bring Turkic Studies in line with ongoing debates and new research perspectives in related academic disciplines.<sup>1</sup> The aim is to fill a gap in the literature on Turkic Studies, where issues of memory and strategies of dealing with the past have been hitherto neglected.

### *The Turkic Speaking World*

Let us begin by clarifying the notion ‘Turkic speaking world’, since for some readers the concept itself may appear questionable if not downright dubious. The Turkic speaking world has been the focus of Turkic Studies (also known as Turcology) ever since the origins of the discipline in the late nineteenth century. Early studies comprised efforts to decipher the Turkic runic inscriptions and to map, describe and classify the Turkic languages and their dialects as well as to understand their history. Linguistic studies almost inevitably entailed an interest in the literatures of Turkic speaking groups, as well as their oral traditions and ethnography.

In later decades Turkic or Turkish Studies continued to preserve the basic philological and literary orientation of the formative period, but the disciplinary boundaries have been modified at many teaching and research institutions, allowing for broad programs that include Ottoman and Central Asian history, literatures and cultures. No consensus has yet been reached concerning the definition of what constitutes the discipline. Uncertainties continue to be perpetuated by the partial inclusion of Turkic Studies under labels such as Middle Eastern Studies, Oriental Studies, Islamic Studies, etc., labels, which are also conspicuous

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<sup>1</sup> This volume has emerged from a panel held at the 29<sup>th</sup> Conference of German Orientalists in Halle/ Saale, Germany, in October 2004. Two of the original participants published their papers elsewhere, and the papers of Eiji Miyazawa and H. Neşe Özgen were commissioned for this volume.

in the titles of academic journals. The waters are further muddied by the fact that the Turkic speaking groups of the Caucasus and Central Asia are sometimes included in the definition, while at other times the study of modern Turkey and its historical predecessor, the Ottoman Empire, is taken to exhaust the field.

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s, Turkey failed to establish itself as the main point of cultural, economic and political orientation for those newly independent states of Central Asia in which the titular majority is held by Turkic speakers. In line with geo-political realities as well as with established historical traditions, these states have continued to look to Moscow's guidance. However, cultural contacts and exchanges have been established and strengthened, facilitated both by linguistic relatedness and by shared religion. Turkic speaking communities have often made conscious efforts to establish economic, religious, scholarly and other contacts with each other as well as beyond the perceived linguistic boundaries, and in an increasingly globalised world links have become livelier than ever before. Such contacts take place not only at the level of international politics, or at official and semi-official institutional levels, but also through multitudinous individual initiatives. Turkic speaking Muslims of the former Soviet Republics and from the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region of the People's Republic of China nowadays regularly take part in the pilgrimage to Mecca; Turkish businessmen and their goods are increasingly present in Central Asian markets; and, following the demise of the Soviet Union, the earlier influx of Central Asian refugees to Turkey has been followed by new waves of entrepreneurs and students. The re-invigoration of pre-socialist cultural contacts between these regions and the emergence of new forms of exchange strengthen the academic case for a broadly conceived discipline of Turkic Studies, and also the case for expanding beyond the narrow confines of descriptive philology. We do not mean to suggest that the Turkic speaking world should be perceived and preserved as an isolated unit of enquiry; rather, it should receive the recognition it currently deserves as a classificatory category, which will be modified in future as a result of new trends, both in scholarship and in developing processes of globalization.

The undeniable linguistic, cultural-geographical and historical connections are to some extent reflected in the fact that a number of scholars trained in the traditional mould of Turkic Studies moved on to study other Turkic languages and cultures after first mastering modern Turkish. The new political constellation, which has emerged over the last fifteen years, has been favourable for scholars, enabling many who started their careers researching in one geographical area of the Turkic speaking world to diversify into other regions and to develop a comparative perspective.

Efforts to promote area studies such as Turkic Studies may appear futile at a time when socio-cultural anthropology, a large discipline defining itself through its research methods rather than through real or imagined geographical, political

or linguistic criteria, is exerting a strong influence throughout the social sciences and humanities. It must be emphasised that it is not our purpose to essentialise the Turkic speaking world. But we do believe that sticking to the convention-sanctioned disciplinary label Turkic Studies/ Turcology has a number of benefits and is conducive to the introduction of wider scholarly perspectives from related disciplines, which define themselves on a geo-political, linguistic or historical basis. The broad definition of Turkic Studies provides a framework for understanding the multi-faceted interaction and exchanges between Turkic speaking groups, as well as for comparative studies that generally have little to do with the genetic relationship between languages; rather, geographical and ecological factors, a history of colonialism, forms of nomadic pastoralism and interaction with sedentary neighbours in the course of history, religion, migration patterns, deportation, contacts with the outside world, styles in policy-making, etc. are likely to be the major variables in comparative analysis.

The traditionally narrow self-definition of Turkic Studies meant that it remained completely isolated for many decades from social science studies of Turkic speaking groups. These were pioneered by the British anthropologist Paul Stirling who conducted the first rigorous empirical study of a village in Central Anatolia in 1949-1950. From the 1960s onward anthropological and sociological studies in and about Turkey multiplied, but the rest of the Turkic speaking world remained by and large a closed world for the international community of social scientists. During this period Soviet and Chinese (in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region) scholarship addressed specific aspects of local minority cultures, focusing particularly on those details, which traditionally constituted the core of the philological enterprise: language, literature and perhaps folklore. For a number of reasons this trend is continuing in the post-socialist period: custom and inertia in the academic world is one factor; the attractions of these subjects for the prevailing nationalist discourses is another; under repressive regimes it is generally more prudent to study folklore than to study the political role of religion, economic inequalities or the unequal distribution of power.<sup>2</sup>

It follows from the above discussion that the Turkic speaking world must be approached as a contingent construct which has emerged in the course of history – just like most other disciplinary classifications. While it cannot be presented as a continuous geographical area, geographical continuities are often salient. The historical continuities are plentiful, but so are the moments of rupture. One may of course question the homogeneity implied by the term, since a great majority of Turkic speakers are not monolingual. Many speak a Turkic language as a first language and another (Russian, Chinese, Tajik, German, Dutch or French, or

<sup>2</sup> In recent years some excellent studies dealing with the social history of the Soviet Union have been published, some also paying attention to Turkic groups (Fitzpatrick 1996, 1999; Martin 2001; Michaels 2003).

another Turkic language) as a second language, or are truly bilingual. Conversely, speakers of non-Turkic languages have been incorporated and thoroughly integrated with Turkic speaking majorities. The Turkic speaking world reveals itself as a complex and diverse space in which various groups assert their identity through manipulation, subversion or promotion of selected elements of past experience. The papers in this volume demonstrate how the past can serve as a resource to create or perpetuate group cohesion.

A further benefit from retaining Turkic Studies to denote a large unit of enquiry is that it facilitates the de-centring thrust of post-colonialism, especially with regard to the Caucasus and Central Asia. Moreover, the area-studies approach has tended to encourage interdisciplinary perspectives, and to give greater voice to non-European societies, to subalterns, to the non-elites, to marginal groups, and to persons whose stories might at first sight appear unimportant or peripheral, or even muted. Local narratives, often competing with each other, the stories of more or less marginal, recognised or tacitly recognised ethnic, religious or professional groups and the contested voices within one and the same group can all become audible and important, and so can one single individual's account of his/her experience of history. The efforts of local scholars and artisans to mobilise selected symbols of the past may be compared with the orchestrated efforts of a new state to mobilise the symbols of the past in self-legitimization. Multiple, parallel and competing voices which may at first appear irreconcilable may complement each other in revealing lived history, showing individuals, groups and subgroups in the process of promoting their understanding of history as well as their sense of social justice.

In short, the frame of Turkic Studies allows us to combine an interest in elites with the study of ordinary people, and ultimately to accommodate all those voices which have hitherto been neglected, ignored or overlooked as trivial, unimportant or, in some cases, even as non-existent.

### *The past as resource*

Scholarly interest in the field of memory has ranged from psychoanalysis to archaeology and the history of art, but it has been most intense at the broad interface between the humanities and social science studies (Antze and Lambek 1996; J. Assmann 1992; A. Assmann 1999; Boyarin 1994; Connerton 1989; Halbwachs 1980 [1950]; Huyssen, 2003; Pine, Kaneff and Haukanes 2004; Ricoeur 2000; Watson 1994, Welzer 2001). In public discourse memory has been 'invoked to heal, to blame, to legitimate. It has become a major idiom in the construction of identity, both individual and collective, and a site of struggle as well as identification' (Antze and Lambek 1996: vii). It also reveals and hides; the past and the present are connected through simultaneous appropriation and distancing, recollection and forgetting. As a means through which people organise their past and

construct their present it is always historically situated, which explains why there is a dialectical relationship between memory and history (Nora 1989: 9).

One of the central tenets of memory studies is contextualization: one needs to ask how, by whom and for what purpose memory is put to use (Zemon Davis and Starn 1989). Memory can be, and often is, instrumentalised to achieve very different ends; it may be used to support or to question claims concerning the distribution of power, or the drawing of boundaries to ensure inclusion or exclusion. It has the power to make the absent and the distant present; it can be a source of legitimising power, prestige or historical privileges, of perpetuating, inventing and denying traditions, but it can equally serve as a locus of resistance. It underpins and shapes identities of persons, groups and even states, and in turn it is subject to intentional or unintentional modifications, selection and distortion. It comes as no surprise that it is intimately connected to the notions of morality and accountability (Antze and Lambek 1996). The factors shaping and influencing memory range from individual narrative strategies, through myths and religious orientations to secular ideologies. Memory is something we can use but also lose over time, in other words, memory itself is subject to historical change (Zemon Davis and Starn 1989: 2). Memory studies have contrasted (and connected) individual and collective memory (Halbwachs 1980 [1950]), cultural and communicative memory (Assmann 1992), while Connerton's tripartite classification distinguishes personal, cognitive and habit-memories (Connerton 1989), but the socially constructed nature of memory and its present orientation are generally recognised by most authors. Nora has pinpointed specific *lieux de mémoires*, which can range from commemorative rites, oral narratives, memoirs and diaries to forms of visual representation that straddle the boundary between memory and history (Nora 1989: 23). Memory is transmitted through narratives which typically lay claims to truth, and some authors define memory as narrative (Antze and Lambek 1996: xiv). Such narratives may include anything from personal reminiscences to lineage genealogies, death rituals, or the official legitimating remembrance of the state. Literary works may also be understood as expressions and transmitters of social memory.

The relationship between history and memory has often been discussed in terms of an opposition, albeit a negotiable one. In contrast to earlier dichotomies which had distinguished between people with and without histories (*Kulturvölker* and *Naturvölker*), between 'hot' and 'cold' societies, Marxist insights and post-modern endeavours have pointed out that official history tends to represent the interests of hegemonic groups (Pine et al. 2004: 8). While recorded, 'official' histories often pay insufficient attention to the unequal distribution of power and insist on hegemonic discourses, memory studies have allowed for competing versions of history, which uncover counter- and subversive narratives and give voice to views, which have previously remained marginalised, unrecognised or even muted. States, but also smaller social units such as descent groups, occupa-

tional or political factions, typically promote their own version of history. In imperial China one of the first acts of each new dynasty was to produce its own dynastic annals in order to legitimise the hegemony of the new rulers; the way in which history was rewritten by the totalitarian states of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was basically the same, but similar processes may be replicated with the transmission of oral tradition, the difference being merely of an institutional nature (Zemon Davis and Starn 1989: 2). While official history tends to insist on a chronological account of events, memory's chronological accuracy is often deficient: it recalls events in fragmentary ways, jumps to and fro in time, evokes impressions, sounds, visions, and emotions and interprets events through the lens of group interests in order to promote identity claims. Introducing local memories into history enriches our understanding of the diverse and contested nature of lived history. Arguably, it is contested memories that can save history from becoming another type of fiction (Zemon Davis and Starn 1989: 4). It may, nevertheless, be useful to differentiate between dominant discourses imposed by state ideology or scholarship, alternative or competing narratives and silences. The discussions around these themes continue unabated, and it is impossible to summarise them all here. In choosing to focus on the past as a resource, in this volume we have followed the present trend to blur the boundaries between the two categories by exploring the grey zone in between.

It is accepted wisdom that remembering takes place as a basic contrast to forgetting, but like most dichotomies this one too deserves closer scrutiny. Forgetting is not merely an alternative way of implicit remembering (Pine et al. 2004: 1). In the production of history it is influenced by a number of forces, motivations and purposes, ranging from state prohibition through fear of retribution, shame and legitimisation of power to issues of resource entitlement. Often these considerations become tools of exclusion and inclusion. It is through selective remembering and forgetting that social relationships are created, perpetuated or denied; remembering and the interpretation of what is remembered thus can become important tools of social control.

Like memory studies, oral history has its intellectual and methodological roots in European traditions, and many studies continue to take their inspiration from European history. But research into the art of producing and transmitting oral narratives has also been conducted among people who did not produce their own written histories before the establishment of colonial administration. Such research perspectives have so far not been employed widely in Turkic Studies. The reasons are diverse. Turkic speaking groups have had a long history of literacy. Those, which came under the influence of Russia and China have been included in the history writing of the imperial power. Those that have come under the influence of Islam have inevitably taken over elements of the rich literate tradition of the Islamic world. The associations of Turkic groups with multiple centres of literacy have perhaps hindered recognition of the importance of

memory transmitted outside the officially institutionalised channels.<sup>3</sup> Political isolation and inaccessibility and the lasting hegemony of totalitarian states, which insisted on promoting their own version of history have impeded the introduction of the alternative perspectives that we develop in this volume. Turkey itself has certainly gone through important changes in this respect. The new wave of democratization, which began in the 1980s has opened up countless new debates and increasingly allowed for research into unofficial interpretations. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the liberalization of the economy in China have not yet had a comparable impact in terms of liberalizing the politics of the past, but these changes have certainly opened up the way for more contact with intellectual currents abroad, and there are good grounds for optimism here as well.

### *The Papers*

Implicitly or explicitly, the eight papers in this volume all address the question of how remembering and forgetting are used by groups and individuals to organise their pasts. All are concerned with the ways in which different versions of history are mobilised as a resource for understanding or legitimising the present or the future. As noted above, these approaches have rarely been applied to the study of Turkic speaking communities. With few exceptions, anthropological studies in Turkey have tended to focus on contemporary societies, while modern western scholarship has only recently begun to pay attention to other Turkic-speaking groups in the former Soviet Union, China and Europe. In post-Soviet societies political upheavals have caused dramatic changes in social relations at all levels, and scholarly attention has concentrated on analyzing post-socialist transformation. In modern discourses considering the past, the socialist period is frequently mentioned but rarely explored in detail (Watson 1994). At the same time a number of excellent historical studies have been published exploring aspects of social organization and social relations during the Soviet period, but these rarely touch upon the post-Soviet period (Michaels 2003; Fitzpatrick 1996, 1999). The main gap in the existing literatures, for both the Turkic speaking countries of Central Asia and other parts of the post-socialist world, is how past and present are linked through personal reminiscences, through the impact of past experiences on evaluating, interpreting and understanding the present and projecting the future, and through the manipulation or mobilization of received traditions to convey novel messages or construct new ideologies. It goes without saying that the perspective of the historian can be fruitfully complemented by approaches from other disciplines.

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<sup>3</sup> The oral epics of Central Asian Turkic groups are a notable exception; but these have rarely been considered to have historical value of any sort.



The papers cover a large geographical area from the Aegean to Siberia and a multiplicity of topics, and they employ a variety of methods. Yet they are held together by much more than the fact they are case studies taken from Turkic speaking groups or states in which the titular group is Turkic speaking (while explicitly or implicitly drawing attention to the internal diversity of these apparently homogenous entities). The central focus of almost all papers is the utilization of the past for the construction of identity, be this national, ethnic, religious, professional or individual (as in the contributions of Friederich and Neyzi). In one way or another, all papers take the contemporary situation as a baseline, and most authors draw on materials based on the first hand knowledge and experience of the people and places they describe. Past and present can of course be linked in many different ways, but there is an almost common concern with *instrumentalisation* as a result of selective remembering or forgetting, whether by groups or by individuals.

The four papers dealing with Turkey focus on events and groups which highlight the historical and contemporary ethnic, religious and linguistic heterogeneity of Anatolia (Miyazawa, Kehl-Bodrogi, Neyzi, Özgen). The anthropologist Kehl-Bodrogi, whose extensive knowledge of the Alevis is based on her long term fieldwork in Turkey and Europe and familiarity with Alevi discourses looks at the symbolic importance of the myth of Kerbela for the Alevis in reinforcing their communal cohesion and legitimising their political claims *vis-à-vis* the state and the majority. Mass migration into the cities and adaptation to an urban lifestyle entailed the collapse of traditional institutions and the interruption of the traditional transmission of religious knowledge. By the 1970s religion had lost much of its previous significance in the formation of Alevi identity. In the 1980s a religious revitalization followed. Kehl-Bodrogi considers the events in Sivas in 1993 as a watershed in Alevi interpretations of the myth of Kerbela. Formerly they had drawn a parallel between Kerbela and their own fight for a proletarian revolution, but after Sivas, Hüseyin's martyrdom served as a symbol of the Alevis' struggle for the interests of their own community. Alevi theorists' discourses on their community's history reveal a multiplicity of interpretations, and their vision of contemporary issues and future priorities requires careful selection.

Özgen's contribution takes as a point of departure a well-documented, specific historical event, the "33 Bullets Incident" of 1943, which involved the murder of thirty-three Kurdish villagers accused of smuggling in Van-Özalp. Using the insights of the "sociology of border" and Cultural Studies, she examines various interpretations of an event that has long been controversial in Turkish political history. Going beyond these, Özgen uses the techniques of oral history, relying on the analysis of in-depth interviews with key persons as well as on written documents, to uncover subaltern narratives that reveal the heterogeneity of the tribal structure and show how the boundaries of exclusion and inclusion shift with the changing political climate. The case study also demonstrates how mem-



ory selectivity is mobilised by people in border regions to establish their relations with the state.

Although the papers of Kehl-Bodrogi and Özgen have been written from different academic perspectives and deal with very different topics, both are concerned with the construction of group identity through diverse and highly contested reinterpretations of the past, which change over time. Like Özgen and Kehl-Bodrogi, Miyazawa too is concerned with the role of the past in identity construction among a non-majority group within the Turkish nation state. He has carried out fieldwork among the Circassians in Turkey and, using the evidence of published intellectual discourses as well as oral history, considers how three versions of local history are put forward by different social groups. The intellectuals' version of history is embedded into Turkish national ideology and is thus in line with the homogenizing tendencies of the modernists' project. Among locals the only meaningful status difference was between descendants of former nobles (*werkhs*) and descendants of former slaves. The former group claimed to have the only authentic version of local history, and denied slave descendants any knowledge of history whatsoever. By conjuring up an imaginary class struggle and emphasising specific historical events, the descendants of the *werkhs* produced a coherent narrative, which explained their own economic demise and the ascendance of the ex-slaves. Their exaggerated binary representation masked the economic heterogeneity within these groups. In spite of the stated ignorance of history among slave descendants, Miyazawa has managed to elicit numerous details of the ex-slaves' versions of history, which emphasise a local versus outsider dichotomy in order to obscure their own low social origins. Unlike the descendants of the *werkh* descendants, they never presented themselves as a homogeneous community; rather, material differences determined the degree to which they appealed to the past as a resource.

Like Miyazawa and Özgen, Neyzi also relies on the methods of oral tradition. But in contrast to the previous papers, all engaged with issues of collective memory in 20<sup>th</sup> century Turkish history, Neyzi considers the burning of Izmir in the life history of one elderly informant from a local noble family. She begins by setting out official Turkish and Greek discourses as a background against which she projects Gülfem İren's reminiscences. These fluctuate between two narratives, the Turkish national narrative on the one hand and on the other, a cosmopolitan perspective of the type also found in Istanbul and Salonica before the First World War. Neyzi shows that it is possible for one and the same person to draw on contrasting narratives. She also suggests that the formerly dominant nationalist narrative may now be fading as a more cosmopolitan narrative re-emerges in the course of current public debates in Turkey concerning identity, globalization and a new interest in alternative histories, which challenge the constraints of Kemalist modernity. While demonstrating the importance of memory in the shaping of individual identity, this case study also exposes its thoroughly social nature.

The papers on Central Asia and Siberia focus on the problems faced by Turkic speaking societies and groups in the post-Soviet space (Aydingün, Schönig), the question of cultural continuity (Günther) and the great potential for further memory studies in the region (Friederich). Like Neyzi, Friederich's subject is a single individual. His paper analyzes the private diary of Khäsän Sadiq ughly Urmanov, born in the early twentieth century in the Tatar village of Äji. The diary was not written for publication and records the author's reflections on the 1920s as he experienced these years as a young man. It was a turbulent decade in the history of the young Soviet Union, and one that brought important changes in the young diarist's life following his migration to Uzbekistan. Friederich challenges the widespread view, embedded in both Soviet propaganda and in the western scholarly literature, according to which all aspects of life in the Soviet Union were thoroughly permeated by Soviet ideology. Friederich argues that the author's stance, showing more interest in his own fate and personal happiness than in the major historical events of his time, reflected typical attitudes of his age. The diary was a reaction to the over-politicization of everyday life in the 1920s; of course its contents may also be shaped by fear and self-censorship. Whatever the motivations, in recording events of his own life, Khäsän Sadiq ughly Urmanov presents key events of his personal life against the backdrop of major historical events, which he refers to selectively, perhaps consciously or unconsciously omitting some of the most unpleasant and disturbing of the latter.

While Friederich's analysis argues against the ubiquitous presence of overarching ideologies in the early Soviet era, Schönig and Aydingün address the influence of state and nationalist ideologies on group identities and their conscious exploitation of selective evocations of the past in the post-socialist era. Aydingün's paper on state symbols in Kazakhstan may be read as a counterpart to the private diarist's selection of contemporary events to be preserved for the future. She looks at how the young Kazakh state remembers through instrumentalising selected elements from the past in order to legitimise itself in the present. A few key elements have been central to the construction of Kazakhstani national identity, notably official state symbols, such as the national flag, the state emblem and the national anthem. In an effort to reclaim their history and emancipate their new state from the Soviet legacy, the new elite have carefully selected symbols to promote an all-embracing Kazakhstani identity, acceptable not only to the titular group but also to non-Kazakh citizens. The symbols selected reflect both ethnic nationalist and civic territorial principles. The language policy, which in the short history of the young state has gone through several modifications, also displays a certain hybridization; both communicative and symbolic functions are considered by the author. Through interviews with representatives of various nationalities Aydingün shows how the inclusivity of these symbols allows for their acceptance to all groups, albeit for different reasons. She points out that it is still too early to gauge the impact of these policies; in any case, the

successful consolidation of an all-inclusive Kazakhstani identity will also depend on ethnic discrimination at the level of everyday practices.

Schönig also looks at manifestations of nascent ethnic nationalism in post-Soviet space. Like many other small groups in the Russian Federation, the modern Khakas, a Turkic speaking group, have been busy constructing a respectable, even heroic past in an effort to emancipate themselves from the Soviet legacy. Activists represent the Khakas as an ancient ethnic and linguistic unit (rather than merely an administrative one), the cultural heirs of the Yenisey Kirghiz, whose runic inscriptions can be linked to the folklore of the modern Khakas. The runes are increasingly used as an identity marker, e.g. in decorating objects sold as souvenirs. Schönig argues that the many linguistic inconsistencies and mistakes in modern use of the old runes amount to a blatant abuse of the past in order to promote an ethnic nationalist project.

Günther's paper looks at the complicated interplay between remembering and identity construction within a highly distinctive occupational group, the acrobats of post-Soviet Uzbekistan. Using empirical data, especially life histories, collected during extensive fieldwork, the author reports on the ambiguities of a supposedly marginalised group. Far from considering themselves marginalised, the acrobats take pride in their profession and construct their collective identities through promoting versions of their history. The stories serve as legitimation of the acrobats' profession, within which the individual's place is typically confirmed through claiming to belong to a particular lineage or through evoking the legendary ancestors of the profession. These origin legends can be used to assign a special role in the Islamisation of Central Asia, while other legends connect the profession to the local landscape and to pre-Islamic times. These contested legends give insight into the special religious powers attributed to Central Asian acrobats; through them, their narrators place themselves in the very heart of Central Asian culture.

In one way or another, all the papers emphasise the role played by the past in constructing, de-constructing and re-constructing social identities; all pay attention to ideology and its instrumentalisation to legitimate claims not only to material resources but to intangible social status. Thus Kehl-Bodrogi's analysis of shifting Alevi interpretations of a key event in the distant past is embedded in the context of the group's changing ideological orientation. Similarly, Özgen explores centre-periphery relations in the framework of multiple interpretations of a single historical event, contrasting diverse official interpretations with local narratives of the major participants, and showing how the competing voices reflect different political, social and economic agendas. Miyazawa shows that among the Circassians different social groups present history or choose to remain silent about it in order to legitimate their present economic and political conditions, while the contested narratives of Günther's acrobats are also put forward to legitimate their profession and promote a corporate identity. The papers

of Neyzi and Friederich both focus on the individual's construction of a personal past, but demonstrate that this is a thoroughly social product, influenced by state ideology and a range of alternative discourses. This influence may assume a negative, reactive form when, as Friederich shows for the Soviet case, an ostensibly ubiquitous ideology is consciously or unconsciously excluded from the individual's record of events. Finally, Schönig and Aydıngün's papers look at on-going efforts in post-Soviet space to mobilise selected elements of recorded history and culture in order to promote the political agendas of an ethnic movement and a new sovereign state respectively.

Another theme running through several of the papers concerns language – both in terms of official legal standing and symbolic power. However, and this point is crucial for a discipline which defines itself with reference to language, the papers also demonstrate that language is not necessarily the most important criterion of identity. In the flux of identity construction, new patterns of internal stratification and competition for resources, not to mention transformations in the religious and cultural context, other factors may come to the fore in mobilising the past as a resource. Thus, while language plays a central role in the ideology of the new Kazakhstani state, it is by no means the only factor to receive emphasis. It is through language that alternative histories are articulated and the papers of Günther and Miyazawa show that particular individuals or groups are credited with special capacities in this respect. However, such recognition cannot completely prevent alternative voices – in the Circassian case, those of the slave-descendants – from telling a very different tale. Constructions of the past may also be shaped by script changes, as Friederich and Schönig point out in very different contexts. In the former Soviet Union the Tatar diarist's descendants could not access his work for seventy years as a result of the change that rendered the Arabic script incomprehensible to the younger generation brought up with the Cyrillic alphabet. By contrast, Khakas nationalists appropriate and exploit the ancient runes to promote a modern, ethno-nationalist ideology, with little regard for scholarly accuracy and rigour.

Taken together, the papers show the limits of the attempts of modern states of varying political orientations to impose homogenising views of history and identity. They draw attention to the value of exploring the complex interplay between memory and history in a large geographical area, which has not hitherto received much attention in international scholarship. In this brief Introduction I have tried to show that a regionally defined discipline can serve as a suitable framework for hitherto neglected fields of research, above all through encouraging interdisciplinarity. Like the agents in the chapters, which follow, the practitioners of Turkish Studies need to be selective in mobilizing their own historical conventions. The regional self-definition should not be fetishised, but these papers demonstrate that, for the time being at least, it remains a productive resource.

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