

□ *Tamás Csérnyi*

HACETTEPE ÜNİVERSİTESİ



HUNGARIAN TURANİSM

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ABSTRACT

With much of the political picture changed since its birth, Hungarian Turanism, born from the search of national identity, having acquired a systematic formation under the pressure of the historical imperative, remains with us, always adapting according to the political necessities and perceptions of the moment. After having passed through a phase of open state support in its golden era, when avowed Turanist leaders were driven by the vocation for political and industrial greatness equaling that of the coveted developed countries, Turanism had nevertheless weathered stages when it was merely tolerated. Finally, it survived prohibition enriched by the sore experiences of the last century, the trauma of two destructive world wars with their results, and the frustration of the suppressed imprinted into its rhetoric.

Therefore, its influence upon Hungarian national-political thinking remained potent all throughout the 20th century, even during prohibition in the decades of Communism. This paper gives a general presentation of Hungarian Turanism from its beginnings to its present manifestations, including notes on its rapport to foreign Turanist movements.

Today Hungarian Turanism shows similarities to contemporary traditionalist, neo-pagan, and anti-globalisation movements. At the moment there are of a multitude of trends, organisations, communities, publications, Internet-sites etc. showcasing various Turanist ideals, yet exhibiting a wide scale of individual features dividing them from one another. Applying the common Turanist label to them prior to an overall investigation would be erroneous, and would no doubt lead to distorted conclusions. However, a more detailed description of the many modern Turanist trends goes beyond the scope of this paper. Therefore, for the time being the author settles for a rough presentation of the past and present Turanist phenomena.

Key Words

Hungary, Pan-ideologies, Pan-Turkism, Turan, Turanism.

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ÖZET

Turanizm 20th yüzyıl boyunca, hatta Komünizmi yıllardaki yasaklamalar sürecinde dahi Macar ulusal-siyasal düşüncesi üzerindeki etkisi güçlü kaldı. Bu çalışma başlangıcından bugünkü görünümüne değin, yabancı Turanist hareketlere ilişkin notlar dahil, Macar Turancılığı ilgili genel bir bakış sunmaktadır.

Doğuşundan bu yana politik tasvirinde pek çok değişiklikler meydana gelen Macar Turanizmi, ulusal kimlik arayışlarından doğmuş ve tarihsel zorunluluğun baskısı altında sistematik bir ideolojik yapı kazanarak mevcut politik gerekliliklere ve algılamalara daima uyum sağlamıştır. Altın çağında açık devlet desteği sağladıktan sonra, ileri gelen Turancı liderlerin önderliğinde, gelişmiş ülkelerin siyasi ve endüstriyel düzeyine ulaşmayı amaçlayan Turanizm, daha sonraki aşamalarda siyasi otoritelerin desteği yerine, yalnızca harekete göz yummasıyla yetinmek zorunda kaldı. Nihayet, Turanizm geçen yüzyılın acı tecrübelerinin retoriğinde bıraktığı izlenimlerle, iki yıkıcı dünya savaşı travmasının, Komünist çağındaki yasağının hüsraniyle bugüne değin ayakta kalmayı başardı.

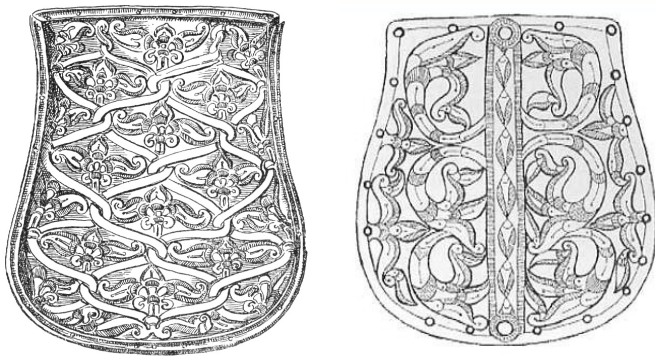
Turanizmin Faşizmle varsayılan ideolojik bağının çürütülmüş olmasına karşın, bugünkü Macar Turancılığı, çağdaş gelenekçi, neo-pagan ve küreselleşme karşıtı hareketlerle benzerlikler göstermektedir. Bugün, örgütler, topluluklar, yayınlar, internet siteleri vb. aracılığıyla Turancı idealleri paylaşan, ancak geniş bir ölçekte birlerinden kendilerine özgü özellikleriyle ayrılan çok sayıda eğilimlerin bulunduğu tanık oluyoruz. Genel bir antropolojik araştırma yapmaksızın bütün bu eğilimlerin genelleştirilerek ortak bir Turancı etiketle aynı potada değerlendirilmesi yanıltıcı sonuçlara götürebilir. Bununla birlikte, daha geniş boyutlu betimleme bu çalışmanın sınırlarını aşacağından, yazar şimdilik, önceki ve günümüzdeki Turancı olguya genel bir bakışla yetinmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler

Macaristan, Pan-ideolojiler, Pan-Türkçülük, Turan, Turanizm.

The Roots and Early History of Turanism

Today Turanism is widely known as a political ideology², although as we shall see, it has not always been so. In addition to what was written about its history, new sociopolitical developments necessitate a reevaluation of this phenomenon, for long time considered an obscure ideology having lost momentum, preserved only by marginal groups. As we face a reshaping phenomenon, instead of stretching its political dimensions thus grossly simplifying it, concerning Hungarian Turanism we settle for the following definition: according to Turanism or the Turanian ideal the so called Turanian peoples are united in blood or cultural kinship and a sort of fellowship in fate. It developed as one in a row of pan-ideologies in the 19th century, and Hungarian Turanism in particular should be perceived as a natural defence response to the timely Pan-Slavic and Pan-Germanic movements (Farkas 2008). Further nuances are added to this description when Turanist movements of other countries or nations are considered in comparison to the one developed in Hungary.



The motifs of the 9th-10th century sabretache-plates, typical steppe Hungarian artifacts, are characteristic decorations of the contemporary Turanist material culture (the two presented designs are copied from findings of Eperjeske and Galgóc).

³At the base of the words “Turanism” and “Turanic” we have the ancient Iranian word *Turan* quoted in the *Avesta* and later by *Firdawsī* denoting the territory north from Iran, the source of numerous attacks of the nomads against the sedentary peoples of the south. Introduced to the European public by the 17th century *Shejere-i Türk*

(‘The descent of the Turks’) of Abu’l Gazi, it was first used by the orientalist Julius Klaproth as a linguistic category in 1802. The linguist Max Müller first used the term “Turanian” in “On the Classification of the

Turanian Languages” in 1854, and then in a speech given in 1861 (as a guest of Arminius Vámbéry at Budapest) as a unifying term to denote all non Indo-European and non-Semitic languages of Europe and Asia. Müller himself later revoked his classification as linguistically and ethnically unfounded, stressing that it is merely a geographic term. However, it quickly gained popularity in the literature, replacing the formerly preferred *Scythia* due to the fact that it permitted otherwise seemingly contradictory theories to fit together in a single conception - like those of the Finno-Ugric or Turkic origins of Hungarians along with the results of modern linguistics and the tradition of Hunnic descent. “Turanic” was later used synonymously with Ural-Altai for a while, or even in a wider meaning incorporating numerous other historical or modern languages and peoples from Sumerians to Tibetans (incorporating mostly agglutinative languages often believed to be historically related due to this common typological trait), even despite the insistence of leading orientalists. For instance

² See for instance: “**Turanism**, or **Pan-Turanism**, is a political movement for the union of all Turanian peoples. It implies not merely the unity of all Turkic peoples (as in Pan-Turkism), but also the unification of a wider Turanid race, also known as the controversial Uralo-Altai race, believed to include all peoples speaking ‘Turanian languages’” (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Turanism>).

³Source:<http://www.magyarvagyok.com/kultura/hungarikum/osmagyar-nepmuveszet/tarsolylemez/444-Eperjeskei-3-sir-tarsolylemez.html>, <http://hu.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tarsolylemez>.

Gyula Germanus stated, that the historical “Turanian” should be perceived simply as a general term for “non-Iranian,” that is equivalent of the Greek *barbaros*⁴ ‘barbarian, i.e. not Greek’.

According to a study initially written for the English MI5⁵ and published in 1918 Turanic peoples are marked by the following features:

1. A common language (i.e. typologically pertaining to the same agglutinative group, and thus characterized by common features resulted by this),
2. Show a wide variety of physical anthropological features,
3. Were all practising shamanism, preserved at least in traces in their traditional culture,
4. Were all Inner Asian nomads at one point in history.

The main ideas of Turanism are so deeply rooted in Hungarian nationalism, that it is necessary to make a few brief notes on the very beginnings of Hungarian national revival in order to fully understand it. In the 19th century, alarmed by Herder’s prediction of inevitable Hungarian decline towards assimilation within a century - surrounded by Slavs, Germans and Romanians, who constituted the majority of the kingdom, the Hungarian elite engaged in a movement of cultural salvage and struggle for political self determination. Quickly being Germanised, Hungarians, attempting to determine the roots of their language and traditional culture seemed to have no kins far and near. When it came to the origins of Hungarians timely historical sources and local traditions pointed to the boundless eastern steppe, where they first appeared in the focus of Arab, Byzantine and other chronicles as a genuine steppe people surrounded mainly by Turkic tribes. These early accounts, together with the medieval chronicles enforced a conscience of Hunnic descent in the aristocracy, that seemed to tie them to the oriental Turks.



The mounted archer, a common symbol of Turkish and Hungarian Turanist movements.

⁶At the very end of the 19th century Magyar intellectuals propounded a new national ideology, more befitting the conservative political system and the interests of the noble classes, that found its inspiration in the mythical past and the striving for political independence instead of the traditional West-oriented self-determination. Turanism was a perfect fit for these expectations, and by 1900 the *Ethnographic Society* began to publish its own journal, the *Keleti Szemle* (‘Eastern Review’), exclusively devoted to Ural Altaic studies (Oğuz 2005: 100).

⁴ Dow M. (2002), <http://mek.niif.hu/02200/02236/02236.htm#5>.

⁵ The **Security Service**, commonly known as **MI5** (Military Intelligence, Section 5), is the United Kingdom's domestic counter-intelligence and security agency and is part of its intelligence machinery alongside the Secret Intelligence Service (SIS; also known as MI6) focused on foreign threats, Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ) and Defence Intelligence (DI). (...) Although mainly concerned with internal security, it does have an overseas role in support of its mission. (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/MI5>)

⁶Source:http://falanszter.blog.hu/2011/06/22/gigantikusz_attila_szobor_es_koppany_torony_turani_epiteszet_budapest.

The Turan Society

The *Turan Society* or *Hungarian Asiatic Society* was established by Alajos Paikert according to the model of the English Royal Asiatic Society. The aim was “to study, promote and cultivate the science, art and economy of Asian and related European peoples, and to harmonise them with Hungarian interests (...) the society is of altruistic interest and excludes politics from its pursuits...”⁷. By 1914 the society had completed several expeditions of natural sciences and ethnography from Anatolia to Lake Baikal. Economic and industrial goals soon became more prominent, as voiced by Pál Teleki:

“Indeed, we aspire to economic expansion, naturally within the foreign policy of the Monarchy, but the same way as Germany and England amongst the great empires or Belgium and the Netherlands amongst small countries. At the moment we have no colonies and we crave for none in the real sense of the word, but as the enterprising craftsman, tradesman, scientists of the small Belgium bring wealth and glory to their homeland even in the most remote parts of the world, the same way we can accomplish similar successes. (...) In these endeavours we are led by no political, nor religious or exclusive racial considerations.” (Teleki 1914: 8-9, translated by the author)

Subsidised by the Hungarian government, besides the scientific activities, the economic and political objectives assumed by the society became more accentuated too, with such significant aristocrats, scientists and public figures in its ranks as Pál Teleki, Béla Széchenyi, Mihály Károlyi, Julius Németh, Ignác Kúnos, Ignác Goldziher, Vilmos Pröhle, Zoltán Gombocz and others (Kincses 1991: 30). The orientalist and traveller Arminius Vámbéry, the society’s honorary president was himself amongst the first adherents of the Turanist thought, unquestionably its most influential diffuser in the Turkic world. The journal of the Turan Society, the *Túrán* began publication in 1913, and it went on appearing until 1944.

Having developed into a geopolitical thesis Turan signified the ideal of the unification of the Turanian race within a united state, or rather a commonwealth of states stretching roughly from the Volga to the Caspian Sea, and from Iran to the Altai Mountains. This was clearly a manifestation of the Hungarians’ search for potential allies in a political environment perceived as hostile (Landau 1995: 80).

World War I and Political Turanism

The Turan movement gained impetus during World War I as the Hungarian government was seeking alliance in the East with Turkey and Bulgaria. Although the result of the so called *Turkish–Ugric War*, a famous scholarly dispute on the origins of the Hungarian language, had ended with the victory of the Ugric side, that claimed the Finno-Ugric roots of Magyar, the public opinion hung on to the nobiliary traditions of the Hunnic oriental steppe origins. The picture of the proud nomadic horseman as ancestor persisted in the general thinking and with time the common international interests and rivals only deepened Hungarians’ solidarity with the Turks, Bulgarians and Japanese (Fodor 2008). Under the new circumstances, defined largely by perhaps the most influential politician of WWI and interwar period Hungary, and with the understanding that Hungary must seize a leading role among the Turanic races to exploit the possibilities within for the better, the further politicisation of Turanism was inevitable.

⁷ The words of Alajos Paikert (Non vidi; cited by Kincses 1991, translated from Hungarian by the author).

Becoming a veritable symbol of wartime solidarity, its potential political significance was soon recognised by the Allies:

“The political potentialities of the rapprochement between these three contiguous peoples [i.e. Turks, Hungarians and Bulgarians] are truly extraordinary. Should this rapprochement prove lasting we shall witness the erection of a solid block, stretching from the middle Danube to Mesopotamia, bound together by that most solid of bonds, racial self-consciousness. And there is no inherent reason why it should not be lasting. The group has a common deadly enemy-Russia, whose triumph would doom all of its members to virtual subjugation. Should the present plans for a great Central European *Zollverein* mature, the tie of self-preservation will be powerfully supplemented by that of economic interdependence. And then, what a revolution in traditional ideas and old political preconceptions. Imagine the effects of Bulgarians ceasing to think of themselves as Slavs, Magyars as Western Europeans, Turks as primarily True Believers; but instead, all three considering themselves fellow-Turanians” (Stoddard 1917: 21).

However, the ideologists of Turkish nationalism (*Türkçülük*) and the English foreign policy reports all agreed that the goals of Turanism could only materialise within the Turkic world (Durgun-Bayraktar 1999: 317). But there an eventual merger of Inner Asian and Caucasus Turks would entirely rearrange the standing world political order (Çağlayan2011, 64a), a scheme in which the stance of the non-Turkic peoples infiltrated into the Turkic world map, like Armenians and Kurds were of utmost importance. And this is how Pan-Turkism was to inevitably develop a chauvinistic approach.

With the Bolshevik Revolution it seemed that⁸ Russia, the common enemy might loose its grip on its Turkic subjects, and indeed, delegations of Siberian Turks came to Berlin, Vienna and Budapest to seek the support of the Central Powers for their cause of national liberation (Sassi Nagy 1918: 21); their struggles stirred up Pan-Turkic aspirations in Turkey as well (Demirkan 2005: 135-6).

Supported by state funds the society engaged into vivid educational endeavors teaching (not only “Turanic”) languages, facilitating student exchange agreements mostly with Turkey and Bulgaria, and in general it served as an influential diplomatic organ between the eastern allies. Subsequently the name of the society was changed to *Hungarian Oriental Cultural Centre*. At this time papers of some of

the most quoted scholars found publication in the societies journal in English, German, French and Turkish, and its editors showed great effort to repel the frequent accusations of dilettantism. Orientalists of international fame like Gyula Mészáros, Béla Vikár, Mihály Kmoskó or Julius Németh



The Turul bird of Rakamaz, a piece of 9th-10th century Hungarian art, often seen on Turanist events.

⁸ Source: <http://kurultaj.hu/2014/02/a-turulmadar-napjainkban-a-kerecsensolyom/>.

were all involved in some way in these publications of high circulation, even if some of them criticised the overall purposes of the movement– like Julius Nemeth, Ignacz Goldziher or Gyula Germanus.

The latter stated in 1916 that “Turanism is building political aspirations on the belief in fictive [ethnic] relationship”. Zoltán Szász in the journal *Nyugat* distinguished between the Turan Society’s true scholars, who delivered a series of valuable studies on the highest scientific level from the damaging “profane or vulgarised Turanian associations and their lowbrow publications”, that were detrimental to the fundamental cause of the pioneering Turanists by producing more social agitation than assessable results (Dow 2002: 31). The *Magyar Szemle* journal charged the society with “fixated anti-Europeaness”. Julius Németh found that the theoretical bases of the movement were scientifically unfounded, and Turanism as a political ideal was unrealistic. Still, he supported its initial goals first noted by Paikert:

“Only two things were mistaken at the founding of the Turan Society: the name and the program. An Ural-Altai Society should have been established instead of a Turan Society, for tending sciences and the cultural–only cultural for the time being–relationship with peoples related to us” (Non vidi; cited by Kincses 1991; translation by the author).

Those critical of the Turan Society still had the option of publishing in the *Kőrösi Csoma Archivum* beginning from 1921 until 1944, when Turanist periodicals were prohibited.

The radicalisation of Turanism in the interwar period

The first split of the society was a clear sign of the ongoing internal ideological confrontations. Thus a part of the scholars went on publishing their work in a new periodical after 1921 called *Kőrösi Csoma Archivum* (‘Kőrösi Csoma Archives’) under the supervision of the *Kőrösi Csoma Society* presided over by Pál Teleki. In the same year the more radical *Hungarian Turan Alliance* was established under the leadership of Jenő Cholnoky and Benedek Baráthosi Balogh, propagating a program that put more emphasis on the ideal of the defence of Turanian racial interests and the historical mission of Hungarians, besides the - by that time entirely illusory - dream of economic power built on the so far barely exploited possibilities of the Turanic orient. After the twenties, synchronising with the contemporary sense of catastrophe caused by the Trianon dictate (known as the “Trianon trauma”), anti-Europe voices became more prominent in some of the Turanist columns.

The most astonishing theories on the glorious origins of Hungarians were a byproduct of the general sense of loss and isolation in society, giving way to new physical anthropological studies aimed to establish the common traits of Turanians from Hungary to Inner Asia (the myth of Turanic races developed in the thirties). Racial purism and “anthroposociology,” along with the idea of the degenerating West had already been prevailing in Europe since the end of the 19th century and these notions fell in well with the main principles of Turanism (Turda 2003). The earlier Russophobic feelings of political Turanists found a new manifestation in anticommunism, and in some marginal groups the disillusionment caused by the outcome of the war and the feeling of injustice they had experienced at the hand of western peacemakers, led to the denial of everything that was occidental all the way to Christian religion (like the *Turanian Monotheist Church*).



**The Koppány (Pagan) Tower in 1935
 and today**

⁹In Hungary, as well as in Turkey Turanism gained new irredentist overtones (as noted relatively early by Toynbee; see Çağlayan 2011), even more so as it went parallel with revisionist objectives in the interwar period¹⁰. The general sentiment of being surrounded by enemies, but lacking allies brought about a new Turanism: originally a downright pacifist, science-oriented movement created to bring cultures together, seize economic possibilities and serve as a bridge between continents “degenerated into a pretext for segregation and ostracism” (Dow 2002: 31). Amidst a scenario of splitting factions and ideological clashes the Turan Society remained active too, situated ideologically somewhere in between the above mentioned two groups. Hungarian conservative Turanists were still thinking in neither linguistic nor cultural terms, their ideal being a Commonwealth-like solidarity of the “Turanian” peoples, with Hungarians serving as a bridge between the East and West.

But there were more ambitious projects besides the educational-exchange student programs swiftly reorganised after the war, although they mostly never amounted to much more. Several daring plans came up for grandiose Turanist monuments, like the Attila statue to be raised on an artificial island in the Danube defiantly facing the stream, turned to the West. Some more monumental plans were proposed by Ferenc Zajti: the Hungarian Museum of Cultural History and Exhibition Hall, a central memorial of eastern and western Turks, or the tallest statue of Attila in the world, at the end of a row of two times twenty equestrian statues and a museum behind it; a Cadet and Student Lodge of Turanian Peoples to accommodate 400 foreign students around the tomb of Gül Baba¹¹. The first project got bogged down in the 20’s, those

⁹Source:http://falanszter.blog.hu/2011/06/22/gigantikus_attila_szobor_es_koppany_torony_turani_epiteszet_budapesten.

¹⁰ After WWI revisionism became the official state policy, and those committed to it had strong arguments to refute the stigma of irredentism: “Or is it irredentism for us to demand a revision of the peace treaty? We actually have two legal claims to justify it. One is clause 19 of the League of Nations Pact contained in the Treaty of Trianon itself, which provides the opportunity for any state to bring the issue of the revision of one or other treaty before the League of Nations. The other is the accompanying letter with which the treaty was handed over and which recognises that if injustices were committed from a national point of view when the frontiers were determined then these would be corrected. We therefore have two claims - and what is more two international claims – to broach these issues and therefore broaching them cannot be construed as irredentism. We certainly preclude any actions, hazardous adventures and conspiracies, but we cannot muzzle the Hungarian public and if the response is that this renders the development of a better atmosphere impossible because we are neglecting to provide a remedy to it, then my reply is to say that there is indeed a remedy to the problem of a better atmosphere, but it not to be found in gagging Hungarian public opinion, but in these circumstances coming to an end!” (Prime Minister István Bethlen 1928; Dow 2002: 9).

¹¹Source:http://falanszter.blog.hu/2011/06/22/gigantikus_attila_szobor_es_koppany_torony_turani_epiteszet_budapesten.

presented by Zajti were dropped due to the war after '43. One of the few plans that actually materialised was the Koppány (Pagan) Tower raised by the Turanian Monotheist Church to the memory of Attila, Árpád¹² and Koppány¹³ on private property to evade the harassments of the authorities. The tower is deserted and practically in ruins today.

The dispute over the scientific foundations of political Turanism

Count Teleki, who stated himself, that Turan is a ¹⁴ geographical and ethnocultural concept and there is no scientific proof to the common roots of the so called Turanian peoples, regarding political Turanism claimed the irrelevance of a scientific justification (Demirkan 2002: 2-3, 77). Back in 1918, in the midst of growing anti-European sentiments and radicalisation he made an attempt to recalibrate the focus of the society stressing the purely geographic meaning of *Turan* once again. However, when it came to politics his vague wording left plenty of space for speculations, thus he was often quoted by Turanists to underpin opposing political convictions.

Contemplating the actual historical bases of Turanism, Stoddard, an early observer of our subject comes to the conclusion, that the historical basis of Turanism was in fact irrelevant when it comes to the sociopolitical necessities that brought it into existence. As one of the conflicting racial ideologies that united perceived kindred nations at this point of history, in an era when political ambitions brought ethnocultural entities into opposing blocks, Turanism was the Hungarian response, founded on ideals that flattered—without a doubt - national pride in less glorious times¹⁵. Especially during the interwar period, as much as historians, sociologists or physical anthropologists aimed to pursue their work governed by scientific objectivity, the narratives they produced in this highly politicised environment transcended their scientific guidelines: willingly or not they served political aspirations (Turda 2010: 33-40). One could argue, that the seizure of



Őrizd a múltad, tiszteld a néped. Őseink szelleme kötelez téged!

The Turanian Traditionalist Association uses motifs of symbolic significance on its coat of arms: the Turul bird, the totem animal of the state founding Arpadian dynasty, the dynasty's flag, the Arpad-stripes in the background, the Székely-Magyar Runic writing, that predates Christening. The logo says "Guard your past, respect your people. The spirit of our ancestors oblige you!".

¹² The leader of the Hungarian tribal alliance that established the Hungarian state in the Carpathian Basin, founder of the Arpadian Dynasty (972–1301).

¹³ The opponent of Stephen I (Vajk, later King Saint Stephen), known for Christening the Hungarian people. Koppány (962-997) is often represented as the leader of the pagans who resisted forceful Christening, although their conflict was about succession to the throne.

¹⁴ Source: <http://kurultaj.hu/2013/08/a-turani-hagyomanyelteto-egyesulet/>.

¹⁵ The unique role of the warlike empire-building Turanians in history was often mysticized with both positive and negative overtones by timely historians and politicians in Hungary and abroad. Some of the more famous examples are: "My feelings towards Hungary were less detached. I confess that I regarded, and still regard, that Turanian tribe with acute distaste. Like their cousins the Turks, they had destroyed much and created nothing." (Harold Nicholson, Secretary of the British Delegation to Versailles in 1919; Dow 2002); "The Turanians have certainly been the greatest conquerors and empire-builders that the world has ever seen. (...) The hoof-print of the Turanian 'man on horseback' is stamped deep all over the palimpsest of history" (Stoddard 1917: 16).

Turanism by the polity came naturally after its institutionalisation with influential politicians at its leadership, in an era of world-wide ideological clashes, totalitarianism and global wars. Along these lines it was argued, that “The asserted leading role of the Hungarians among other Turanic races denoted the politicisation of the Turanist movement” (Oğuz 2005: 103). Nevertheless, the frequent assertion, that it was a “pseudoscientific ideology” is only valid in the sense that in the early days of Turanism its promoters tried to argument its goals scientifically. Despite these early attempts to scientifically validate its objectives, the truth was that political Turanism did not need a scientific foundation at all, and so it swiftly abandoned its scientific aims. Indeed, the ideology did found its claims on romantic myths instead, such as the myth of common origin, fate and blood, amongst others. No less than than any other (eastern) ethnic nationalism... József Schmidt, a renowned opponent of Turanism, after declaring its basis as far from the truth as “Makó from Jerusalem” scornfully asserted that its political objectives require no scientific justification: “But why struggle, if it doesn’t need it? If Turanism is a political movement, and it is, then it does not need at all to demonstrate its scientific legitimacy” (Schmidt 1925).

Turanism is often judged according to one-sided knowledge resulting in simplistic definitions that are missing the multidimensional character of the subject. There is a cultural Turanism, founded on scientific theories that were subsequently refuted partly due to the findings of its own researchers and organisations; and there is a political Turanism, that conceived the ideology merely instrumental in realising its political, commercial and economic aspirations, and should be dealt with on its own merits.

Turanism and Turkish nationalism

Abroad Turanism never gained wide acceptance. The two movements of Turanism and Turkish Nationalism (where Turanism was practically synonymous with Pan-Turkism) blooming around the same time found few productive bonds. During WWI, although the ideals of Turkish nationalism were widespread amongst the Ottoman intelligentsia, the leading *İttihat ve Terraki Partisi* (Committee of Union and Progress) could not afford to openly commit itself to them since it was pursuing the conservation of the old order of the Empire¹⁶. Therefore it was pragmatically juggling often contradictory ideas of Pan-Turkism, Turkism and Pan-Islamism according to political purposes, managing to win the sympathy of both the Turkic and the Muslim world for its cause. In terms of regional alliances it turned its focus to Asian Turks, rather than the lost Balkan dominions inhabited by culturally and religiously alien peoples (Çağlayan 2011, 65a-b). As Arnold Toynbee (authorised by the Bureau of Intelligence of the English Ministry of Foreign Affairs to prepare a report on the political prospects of Turanism) correctly observed, the formation of a veritable Turkish Nationalism only seemed possible with the fall of the Ottoman Empire, after which Turkey would pose as a protector Hinterland of Oriental Turks, just as Russians did in the Balkans. Needless to say though, Tatars, who represented almost half of all Turkic population (16 million, twice the number of Ottoman Turks at the time) were then the main propagators of the Pan-Turkic cause.

¹⁶ Even if behind the scenes attempts for national salvage led to particularly oppressive objectives much earlier, like the objective of Turkicization through Islam announced as early as in 1911 at a congress of the İttihat ve Terraki Party. This was beyond a doubt a radically nationalist objective, and as such altogether alien to the Empire’s political traditions (Çağlayan 2011, 66b).

The concept of Turan was incorporated into Pan-Turkism under the influence of Russian Tatar intellectuals and Young Turks (Stoddard 1917: 17-8) signifying the homeland of all Turks (without any mentioning of Hungarians¹⁷; Önen 2003: 125-6), however the idea was dropped by Kemal Atatürk after the war as politically unrealistic¹⁸ (Kincses 1991: 33). It is a well known fact that Atatürk was orchestrating the Turkish language reform and various historical investigations himself in close contact with International and of course Hungarian Turkology. The establishment of the Department of Hungarian Studies in Ankara and the rising interest in Oriental and ancient Middle Eastern civilisations all mark the same pursuit to reveal the prehistory of Turks (Çolak 384). But these pursuits never amounted to much in a political sense. Similarly in Hungary Turanism is today widely acclaimed for the past achievements accomplished under its aegis in the field of culture and science while deemed unrealistic for its political purposes.

From prohibition to revival



“We are the descendants of Attila too!”

publications of proclaimed ancient wisdom²¹, and a *Proto-Hungarian Church*²² are all here to add new colours to the kaleidoscope of modern Turanism. In 2005 there was an official initiative for the recognition of the Hun minority of Hungary submitted by 2,381 signatories, subsequently dismissed based on the advisement of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences²³. These groups often proudly voiced

¹⁹After 1944 all publications and organisations tied to Turanism were prohibited in Hungary, thus the unbiased scientific elaboration of the Turanist phenomenon was rendered entirely impossible. Still, the appeal of Turanist principles survived undiminished during the decades of Communism amongst Hungarian emigrants abroad. As it happens, after the lifting of Communist censorship a multitude of domestic and foreign publications more or less identified with thoughts of Turanism flooded the country, and new organisations, Internet sites and conferences of Hungarian “alternative” prehistory popped up far and near. Modern *táltos* (shaman), unconfirmed reports of old enigmatic scripts on Hungarian prehistory²⁰ or

¹⁷ Pan-Turkism often identified Islam amongst its main pillars. Most political thinkers appreciated that while Finns and Hungarians are brothers, they fell too far behind hostile Slavic and Germanic masses to be included into a realistic scheme of political unity (Önen 2003: 132).

¹⁸ In the interwar period the strategic rapprochement between the Soviet Union and the young Turkish republic resulted in a softening of Turkish nationalist rhetoric, and Pan-Turkic ideas were viewed with much suspicion. In a new edition of a book of poems called *Turana Doğru* ‘On the Way to Turan’ Mehmet Emin replaced the word Turan with *vatan* ‘homeland’. Ahmet Ağaoğlu, Halide Edip and Yusuf Akçura all declared in 1922 and 1923 to have abandoned Turanism under various pretexts, and the centres of *Türk Ocakları* (‘Turkish Fireplaces’, a network of nationalist organisations) were later closed by Kemal Atatürk (Tanay 2013).

¹⁹ Source: <http://galeri.uludagsozluk.com/r/kurultaj-482996/>.

²⁰ http://hu.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iszfah%C3%A1ni_k%C3%B3dex.

²¹ <http://hu.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arvisur%C3%A1k>.

²² See <http://www.osmagyaregyhaz.hu/>.

²³ <http://www.nvi.hu/ep2004/04/hu/04/2004-122ovb.html>, <http://www.hunok.hu/hunkisebbseg/hirek.html>.

their purely non-academic stance on Hungarian prehistory as they felt, that the Academy, along with all leading institutions that survived the past regime has been discredited by having been associated with it. Another frequent argument brought against the Uralic theory (that challenged the tradition of Hunnic descent), is that it is rooted solely in linguistics and was imposed or actively promoted by the Habsburgs to undermine the secular Hungarian aristocratic identity. Their set of references range from scientific (if disputed, like the works of Vámbéry or Gyula László) to fantastic.

For what concerns the past decades the formation of Turkic states in Central Asia and the common ambitions with the European Union of both Hungary and Turkey have kept radical voices at repose. However, with the rise of Euro-scepticism in both countries and the formation of new political, ideological alignments Turanism is again winning over new adherents.



Performer on the stage of the 2010 Kurultaj

²⁴Undoubtedly the most prominent Turanist organisation since the fall of Communism, the *Hungarian Turan Foundation* has been involved in putting on various international traditionalist events since 2007²⁵ both at home and abroad (the *Hungarian Tribal Conference* most importantly, “the tribal conference of peoples of Hunnic and Turkic conscience”²⁶). Moving enormous crowds, with the participation of artists and delegations from many Asian and European countries²⁷, it does perhaps a better work connecting to fellow

movements abroad, than their predecessors have. Their quest is matched by the the similar interests of many Asian Turkic groups, that arose after the fall of the Soviet Union²⁸. Although the new Turanist movement—with a unipolar organisation headed and represented on all forums by András Zsolt Bíró, offers a unique international cultural scene, unfortunately beyond informative activities (a new *Turán* periodical has been established) it lacks the scientific dimension that brought fame to its precursor²⁹.

²⁴ Source: <http://kurultaj.hu/2012/05/kurultaj-2010-ujabb-olvasoi-fotok>

²⁵ In 2007 a Hungarian delegation joined the Kurultay of the Madyar tribe in Kazakhstan. Next year the first Kurultaj in Hungary was organised in the countryside of Bösztörpuszta on the same site that has hosted the event every other year since then (<http://kurultaj.hu/kurultaj/>).

²⁶ <http://kurultaj.hu/>, <http://www.nyest.hu/hirek/kurul-taj-magyar-ecsettel?comments>.

²⁷ Artists and delegations of 24 countries and autonomous republics were named as working with the conference in 2013 (<http://www.magyarhirlap.hu/az-igazsagvaro-hangulat-koraban>).

²⁸ On Turanist parties in Central Asian Turkic republics see Tanay 2013: <http://www.turansam.org/makale.php?id=6331>.

²⁹ I have not found trace of any scientific (sponsorship) program associated with the organisation, other than the ongoing interethnic DNS comparison project. The only study connected with the movement is a disputed publication in the same subject: Biro András Zsolt et al (2009): A Y-Chromosomal Comparison of the Madjars (Kazakhstan) and the Magyars (Hungary). In: *American Journal of Physical Anthropology*.

The 2012 Kurultaj hosted the biggest number of participants so far and received unique media coverage in Turkey (while having its significance often missed or understated by the domestic media) due to a series of unmistakable gestures directed towards Turkey at the event, such as flying the Northern Cyprus Turkish Republic flag. Along the same line of thought the *Jobbik Movement for a Better Hungary* party, a declaredly Turanist establishment, having been elected into the parliament in 2010 presented a motion for the recognition of the Khojálí massacre as genocide in April 2011³⁰. The head of the party, Gábor Vona frequently appeared in the Turkish media under the motto *Biz de Attila'nın torunlarıyız*, 'We Are the Descendants of Attila too'. This motto appeared later on a huge banner hoisted as a friendly gesture of the Hungarian supporters to the hosted Turks at a football game in October 2012 (2014 World Cup European Qualifiers)³¹. On the margin of the following reports on these events, once again the Turkish Nationalist media spoke of the compelling project of the union of Turkic Republics³².

As a final conclusion it seems safe to declare, that Schmidt has underestimated the persistence of Turanism ("the ideal of Turanism, as a fantasy originated from wartime psychosis will according to all appearances shortly vanish without a trace"; Schmidt 1925). Deemed an obscure ideology of the past Turanism has survived the political circumstances that brought it to life and it has found its way into the thinking and material culture of an active social group³³, not timid at all in its manifestations and courted by members of the parliament.

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³⁰ (<http://www.21yyte.org/tr/arastirma/macaristan/2012/10/22/6769/macaristan-turanci-hunlarin-ulkesi>).

³¹ <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/-biz-de-atilla-nin-torunlariyiz/dunya/sondakika/05.01.2011/1335114/default.htm>, <http://www.dunyabulteni.net/?aType=haber&ArticleID=231460>.

³² That is the Central Asian ones; this is the appropriate place to note, that the Turkish rightist media often portrays Hungarians in an ethnocentric manner as Turks who diverged from the vast Turkic community when Christened.

³³ See <http://www.szkitabolt.hu/>.

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