

Educational Resources and Developments

Teaching about Central Asia at Yeditepe University, Istanbul

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Yeditepe University was created as a "foundation university" (i.e., private institution) in 1996 by the Istanbul Education and Culture Foundation. Its enrollment now exceeds 10,000 students, of whom about 30 percent are graduate students. In keeping with its emphasis on preparing students to function in the modern world of business, law, medicine and technology, the university's primary language of instruction is English, although some course work is also in French and German. (The main language of instruction in state universities is Turkish.) Among the divisions within Yeditepe University are a School of Applied Sciences and a School of Vocational Studies.

Two departments within the Faculty of Science and Letters — the Department of Turkish Language and Literature and the Department of History — offer courses pertaining to Central Asia. In contrast to the American system where students often do not choose a major until their third (junior) year and tend to take a broad range of electives, at Yeditepe the major is selected at admission and the curriculum is largely fixed, with most of the course work directly connected to the discipline. Thus all of the students in these two departments receive some exposure to Central Asian history and culture. This is a situation which those in other countries who teach only the occasional Central Asia course, and that rarely a "required" one, can but envy.

Yeditepe's Department of Turkish Language and Literature offers two courses on the historic Turkic languages of Central Asia. The texts studied include the Orkhon inscriptions, *Qutadghu Bilig*, *Diwan lughat al-Turk* of Mahmud Kashgari, the *Muhabbatnama*, Babur's memoirs, and writings by Alisher Navoi. While the historic languages of Central Asia are offered, the department's focus has shifted to the study of modern Turkish language and literature, which is important preparation for the study of other Turkic languages.

The History Department's program understandably includes a heavy emphasis on the history of Turkey and its immediate neighbors, of the Turkic peoples and of the Mediterranean and Islamic worlds. Students take either six or seven courses each semester. No fewer than seven of these semester courses deal with Ottoman history and another four required semester courses (offered within the History Department) are to teach students how to read Ottoman texts. Russian/Soviet history receives a fair amount of attention, both in a separate course and as the context for the study of the Turkic peoples of Central Asia. Among the electives are courses on the history of the Balkans and history of the Caucasus. There are also required courses on historical methodology. Students may elect to do a double major. Most courses have small enrollments, which provides plenty of direct contact with the instructor in a seminar setting.

In their freshman year students take a two-semester sequence on the history of the Turkic peoples in the pre-Islamic period. This provides some of the background for Professor Devlet's two-semester course on Central Asia from Chinggis Khan to the 20th century, required of all history majors in their second year.

Professor Devlet's course begins with several sessions on geography, emphasizing the features of the natural environment which have affected patterns of human habitation. This section of the course also ensures that students have a basic acquaintance with important places and the locations and boundaries of political entities, both historic and modern. The knowledge acquired is reinforced by having students draw their own maps of the region and then take an in-class map quiz. This considerable emphasis on geography addresses the issue that too many students may never previously have looked seriously at a map of Central Asia and may not even know the locations of the contemporary Central Asian states.

Where possible, videos and other visual aids are used to enhance the course and occasionally visitors from the region meet with the students.

Readings for this survey course and for Professor Devlet's senior year course on the Contemporary Turkic World are drawn from scholarship in English and in Turkish. Two of his own books are among the required readings. One is an English-language textbook survey, *Empires in Eurasia from Chingiz Khan to the 20th Century*, and the other a monograph, *Rusya Türklerinin Milli Mücadele Tarihi (1905-1917)* [The History of the National Struggle of the Turks of Russia (1905-1917)].¹ For the survey course students read Grousset's *Empire of the Steppes*, Allworth on the Uzbeks, Olcott on the Kazakhs, and Hopkirk's *Great Game*. For the upper division course on the contemporary Turkic world, the readings include Bennigsen and Wimbush, Rywkin, Fisher on the Crimean Tatars, and Rorlich on the Volga Tatars. Other reading is drawn from a broad range of literature in Turkish. Students may read in Turkish their William of Rubruck and such classics of scholarship as Spuler's study of the Ilkhanids, Vladimirtsov's interpretation of Mongol "feudalism," and Togan's *Bugünkü Türkili Türkistan ve yakın tarihi*. There is also a very extensive Turkish-language literature on various Turkic peoples of Central Asia, for example: Müstecib Ülküsal on the Crimean Tatars, Muzaffer Ürekli on the specific topic of Ottoman-Crimean relations, and Erkin Alptekin on the Uyghurs. The issue of East Turkistan receives attention in, among other sources, İsa Yusuf Alptekin's *Doğu Türkistan Davası* [The Case of East Turkistan]. Several of the reading assignments concern the development of national identities, ranging from the period of the late Tsarist empire down to the post-Soviet era. The course on the contemporary Turkic world also draws upon recent publications dealing with relations between Turkey and the countries of Central Asia, e.g., Devlet's "Turkic World and Turkey (Perspectives — Realities)."

As Professor Devlet emphasizes, the substantial presence of Central Asia-related courses in the curriculum does not necessarily indicate a high level of demand for the subject. He is the only faculty member in History with a real specialization in the region, even though two of his colleagues teaching international relations have some knowledge of the area and incorporate related material in their courses. Although the students at Yeditepe take the required courses, most are less interested in studying Central Asia than they are in learning about the European Union, presumably in part because of their perception that Turkey's economic future lies there. That said, there are a good many Turkish businessmen active in Central Asia and the Russian Federation. Turkish businesses operating in Central Asia often prefer to hire those who come from that region because of their knowledge of both the local languages and Russian. Such employees can often be found among the substantial number of Central Asian students studying today in Turkish universities.

While Yeditepe University does not have exchange programs with Central Asian countries, some of the state universities do offer opportunities for both faculty and students to study there. Such programs are often coordinated and supported by the Turkish Higher Education Organization and in some cases by private firms which fund Turkish schools in Central Asia and send teachers there. Most of those teachers attend the local universities and learn the local language. There are also Turkish universities in Kazakhstan and in Kyrgyzstan. Other opportunities for Turks to study in Central Asia are supported by the TİKA (*Türk İşbirliği ve Kalkınma İdaresi Başkanlığı*) program of the Prime Minister's office, which undertakes various development projects.

More information on the program and Yeditepe University can be found at <http://www.yeditepe.edu.tr/7tepe/>

¹ Full bibliographic information on all titles assigned in the course "Contemporary Turkic World" can be found in the course's syllabus at http://cessww.fas.harvard.edu/CESWW_syllabi.html