

# Turkiye's Eurasian Hinterland

OLLI Fall 2022

Janice Lee Jayes

Jayes2@illinois.edu



# Why did I want to explore this topic?

One of the things I realized during my Fulbright year in Turkey (2021-2022) was that I had underestimated the cultural bonds between Turkey and the other Turkic states.

I had understood the relationship as a product of Turkey's ambitious foreign policy in the region, but over time I came to see it as a cultural movement that was much deeper than just a government policy.

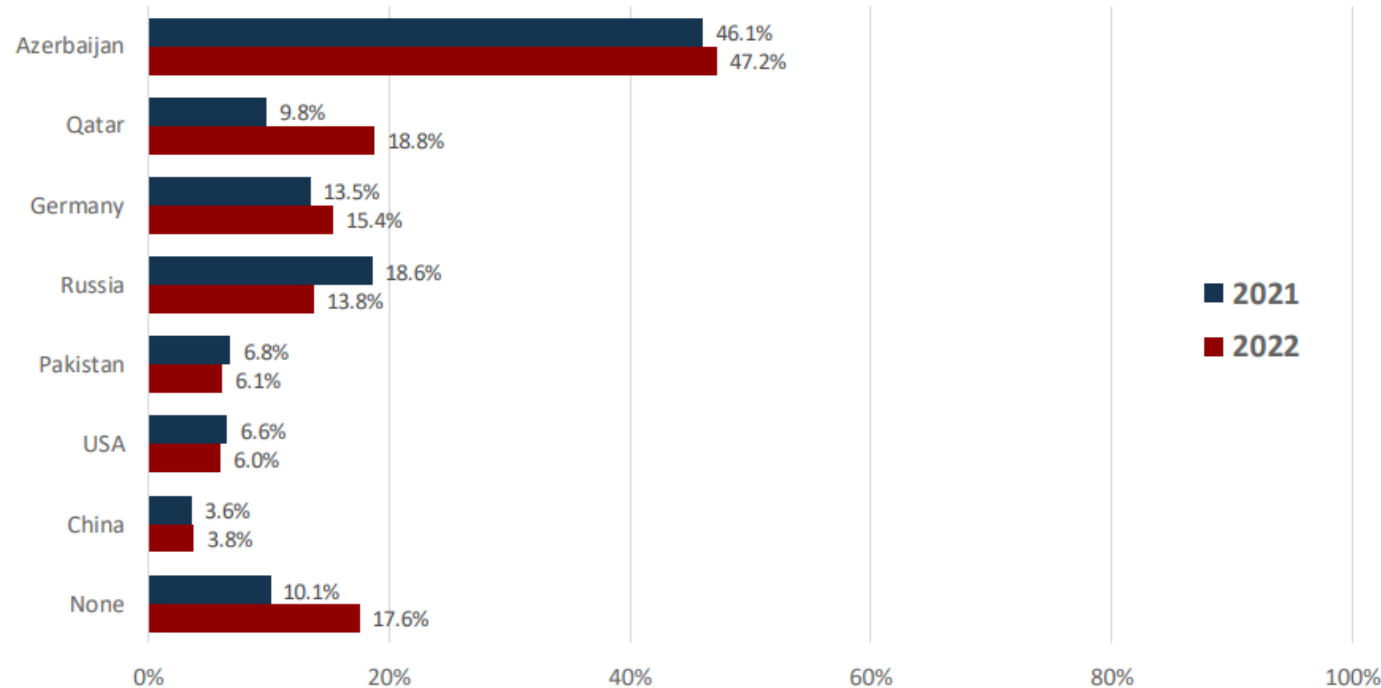
I had lived in Kyrgyzstan, another Turkic country, back in 2001-2002 and I realize now that at the time I was looking at the country and the region through the Russian/Soviet prism that was trying to hold onto the pre 1990 world. It saw the Turkic peoples as if they were exiting the world stage to make way for Russian/Soviet modernity.

Ironically, it has become pretty clear to me now that it is the Turkic people that remain. The Russians are leaving the Central Asian stage and a revival of Turkic culture is underway. This class is a way to explore a Turkic-centered history of the region.

The results of the 2022 German Marshall Fund survey of Turkish citizens' opinions on Turkey's "Most important Partner" were a surprise to me. Azerbaijan? I would never have guessed! It tipped me off that I was missing something in the way Turkey thought about the world.

G | M | F

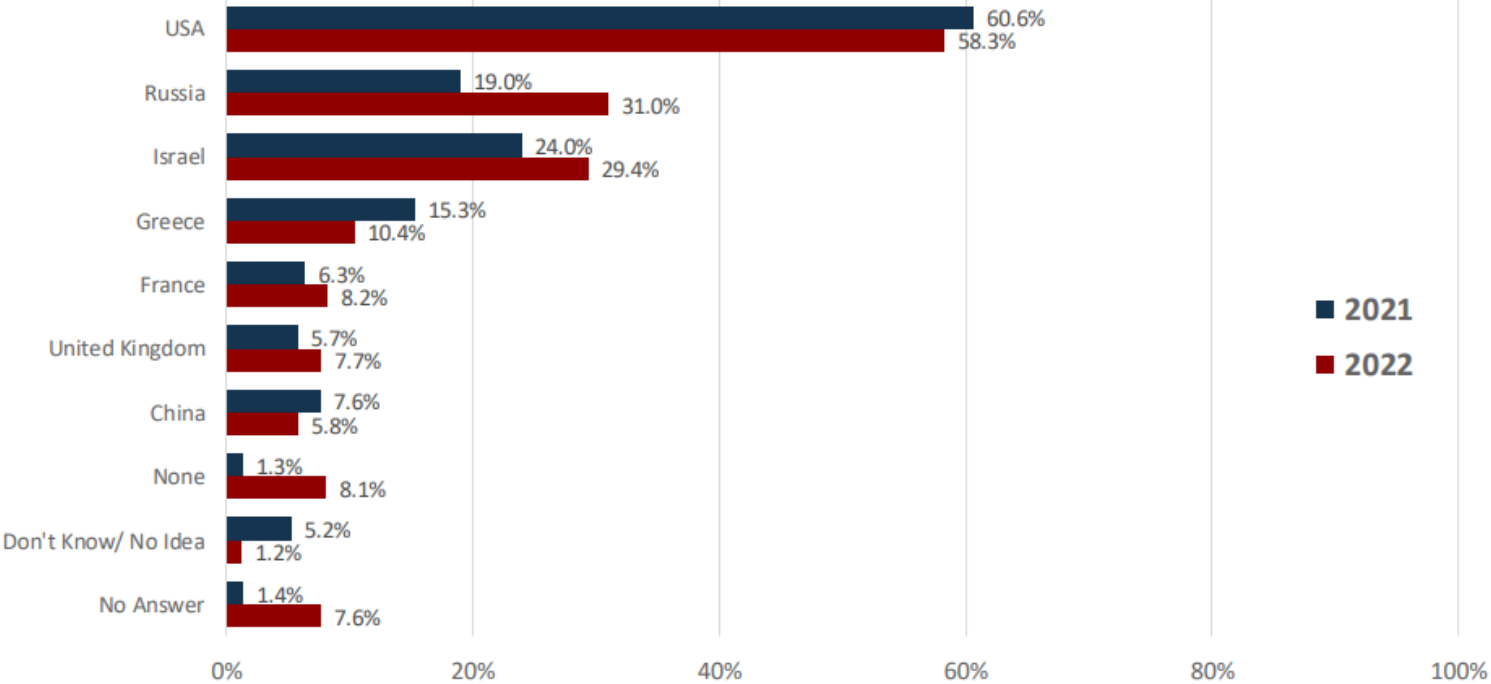
## The Most Important Partner (2 Responses)



«When you think of international relations in the broadest context, which country do you consider to be Turkey's most important partner?»

The “biggest threat” to Turkey (the USA) a bit less of a surprise. The years of the Global War on Terror left an impact on how the region thought of the US. My students in Turkey thought of NATO and the US as more of a danger to world order than Russia based on NATO’s actions since the 1990s.

### Biggest Threat to Turkey’s National Interests (2 Responses)

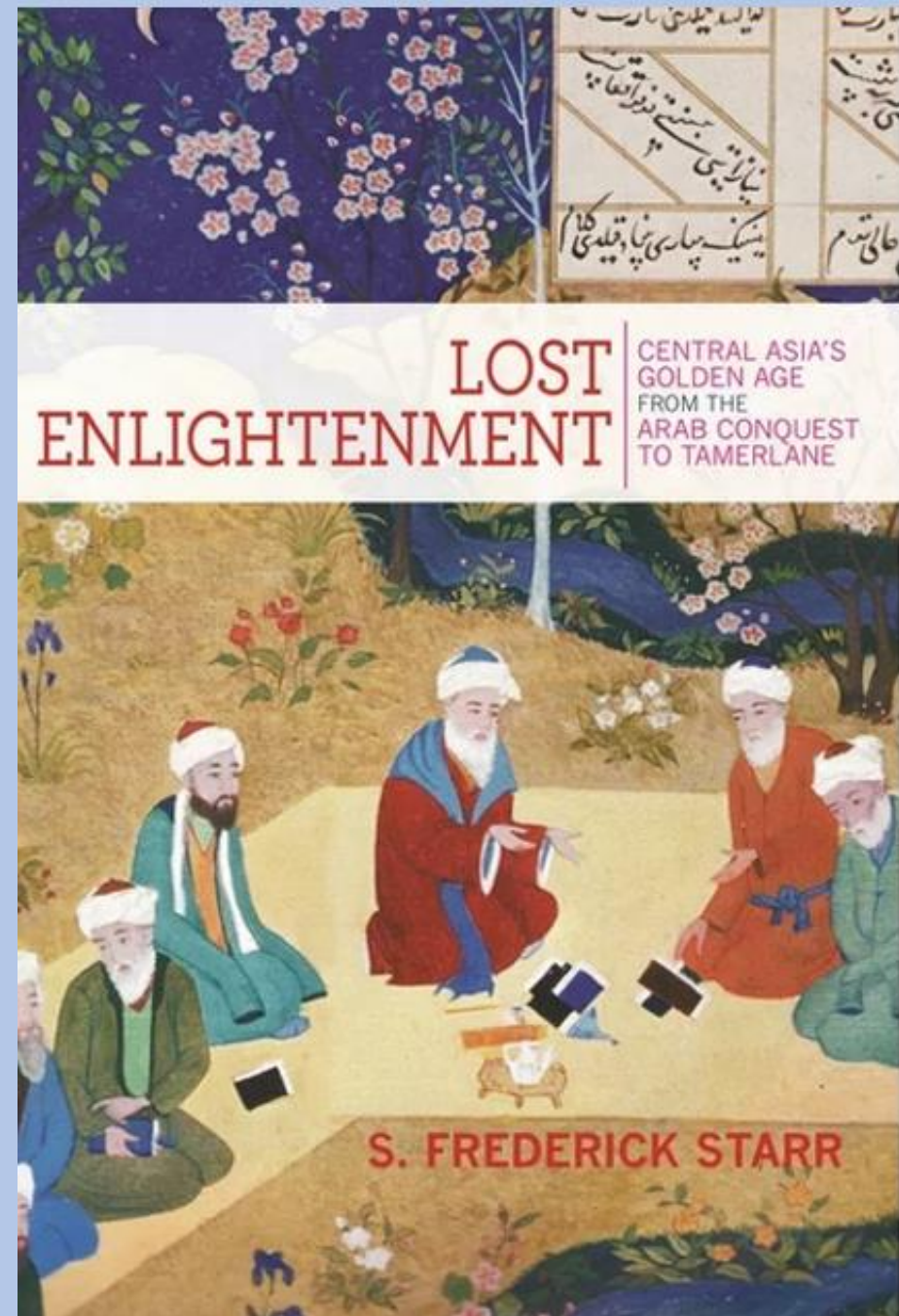


“Which country or international community is the biggest threat to Turkey’s national interests according to your opinion?”



My education in history was typically “Arab-Centric” and ignored the Turkic world.

This book is a classic example of Arab-Centrism in Mid East studies where the Arab “enlightenment” is put to death by the arrival of the Turkic peoples. I hadn’t even realized how pervasive this is in Middle East scholarship until I was seeing it from the Turkish perspective.



In part this reflected the reality that, until 1991, there was little opportunity to train Turkic scholars or explore the Turkic hinterland. The USSR controlled access to much of the Turkic heartland.





When the end of the USSR did come, the *“Turkish Model”* helped the US deal with the mystery of post-Soviet Central Asia.

The “Turkish Model” was the idea that Turkey, a “firm Western Ally” would be the best to lead outreach to the newly independent states and guide them on the path to moderate Islam and pro Western politics..



President George H Bush meeting with Turkish President Ozal in Ankara, 1991.

# The “Turkish Model” had an uneven history in US foreign policy

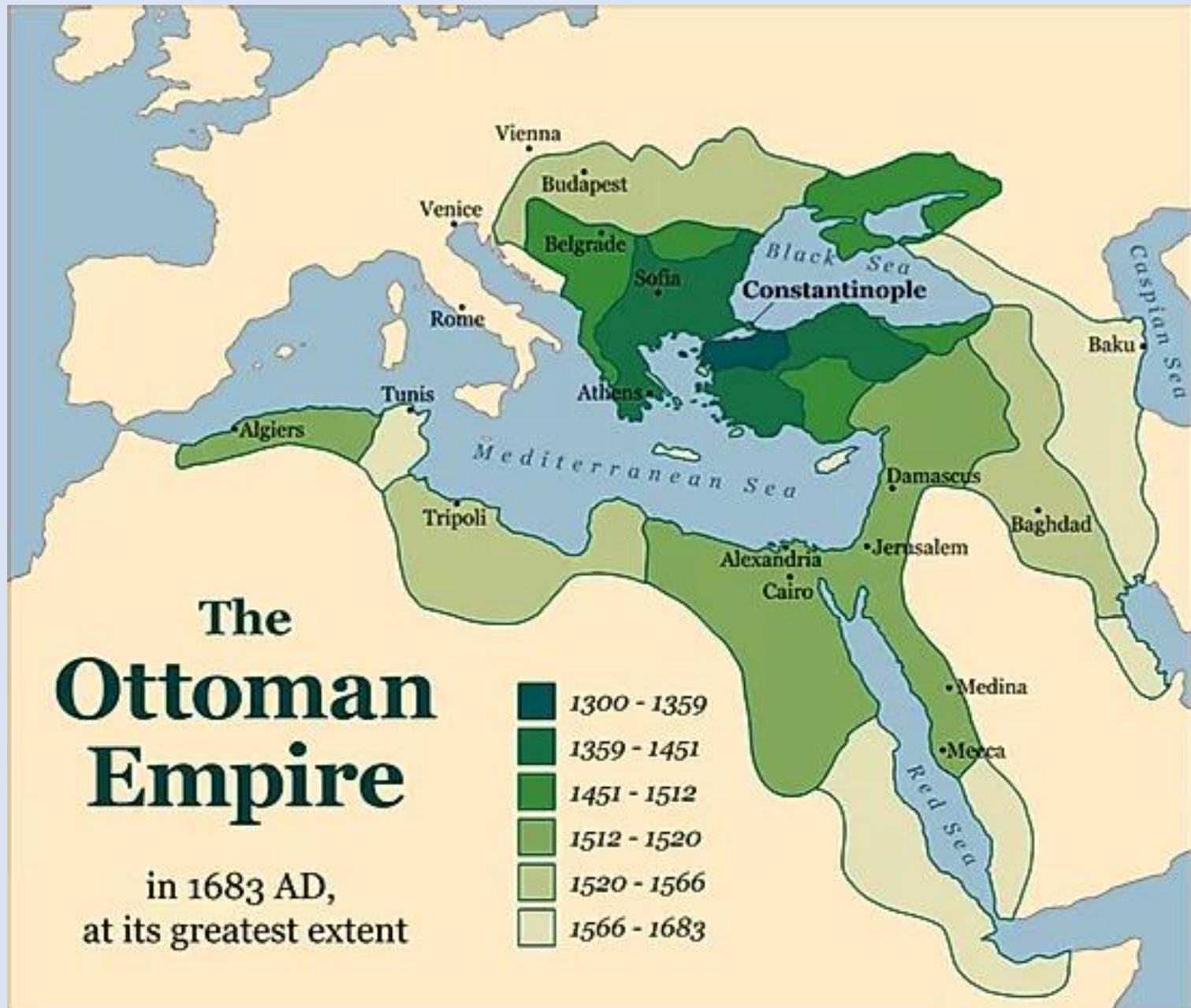
*“The model became a Rorschach inkblot—interpreted and applied in numerous ways, often revealing more about U.S. anxieties in periods of geopolitical turmoil than about Turkey itself.” (<https://www.americanprogress.org/article/the-turkish-model/>)*

- Truman Doctrine 1949– Turkey a bulwark against Soviet Expansion! Religion a positive protection against communism! The British screwed up relations with the rest of the region, but Turkey a new start!!
- 1960-70s – what a disappointment. Best not to look closely at Turkish “democracy”
- 1980s – Turkey a badass! gives quiet support on Afghanistan, helping block the USSR
- 1990s – “How to be a Muslim country without being the Taliban” Turkey as a model of moderate Islam.
- Post 9-11 – “See, we have Muslim allies in the War on Terror” (US commenting on Turkey)
- 2003. Oops. Turkey has its own opinions about Iraq, (denies access to Turkish airspace).
- 2011 Arab Spring – Turkey praised as a model for secular, Islamic democracy. (til 2015 when Erdogan becomes problematic for the US in Syria)



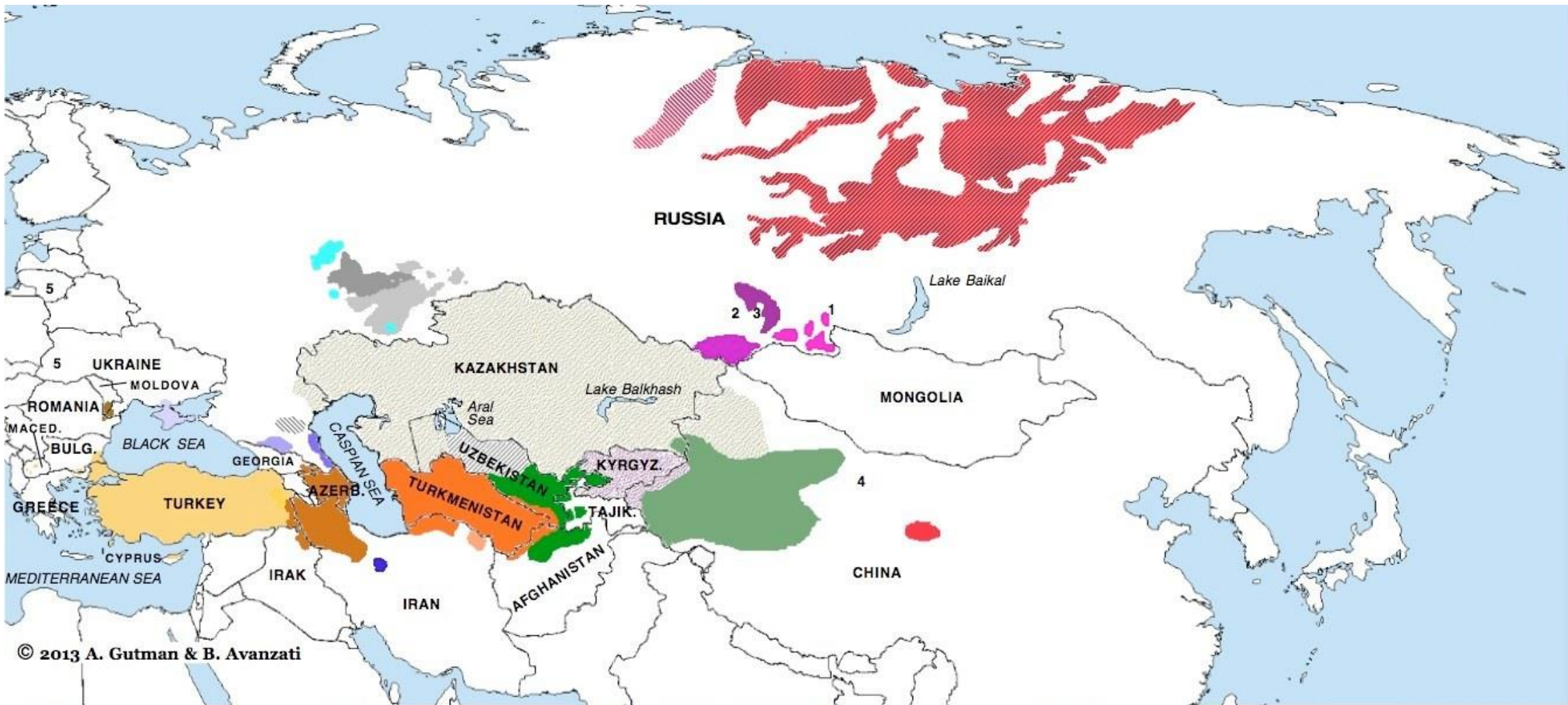
# How does Turkiye think of its Turkic/Central Asian role?

- 1880s – 1930s emergence of Turkic nationalist ideas.  
Turanic Studies part of the language-national identity enthusiasm in late Ottoman Empire and Turkish Republic; but Turkey cut off from other Turkic peoples by Russian/USSR borders
- 1990s – Turkey embraces the vision of itself as a “big brother” to Central Asia – education, technological assistance, trade delegations, cultural exchanges...Central Asian states see an alliance with the EU or US or even China as bringing more benefits though.
- 2010s a new era of outreach to Central Asia opens under Erdogan



The world press makes a lot of noise about neo-Ottomanism, but the rediscovery of Turkic bonds much older, and geographically more expansive, than the Ottoman world.

This map sees most of the Ottoman World reaching West, the following map shows that it is to the East that most Turkic speakers are still found.



© 2013 A. Gutman & B. Avanzati

Oghuz	Kipchak	Chuvash	Khalaj	Uyghur-Karluk	Siberian
Gagauz	Crimean Tatar	Chuvash	Khalaj	Uzbek	Altai
Turkish	Karachay-Balkar	Tatar	Uyghur	Khakas	Yakut
Azerbaijani	Kумыk	Bashkir		Tuva	Dolgan
Turkmen	5. Karaim	Nogai			
Khorasani Turkic		Kazakh			
Salar		Karakalpak			
		Kirghiz			

# Turkic Languages

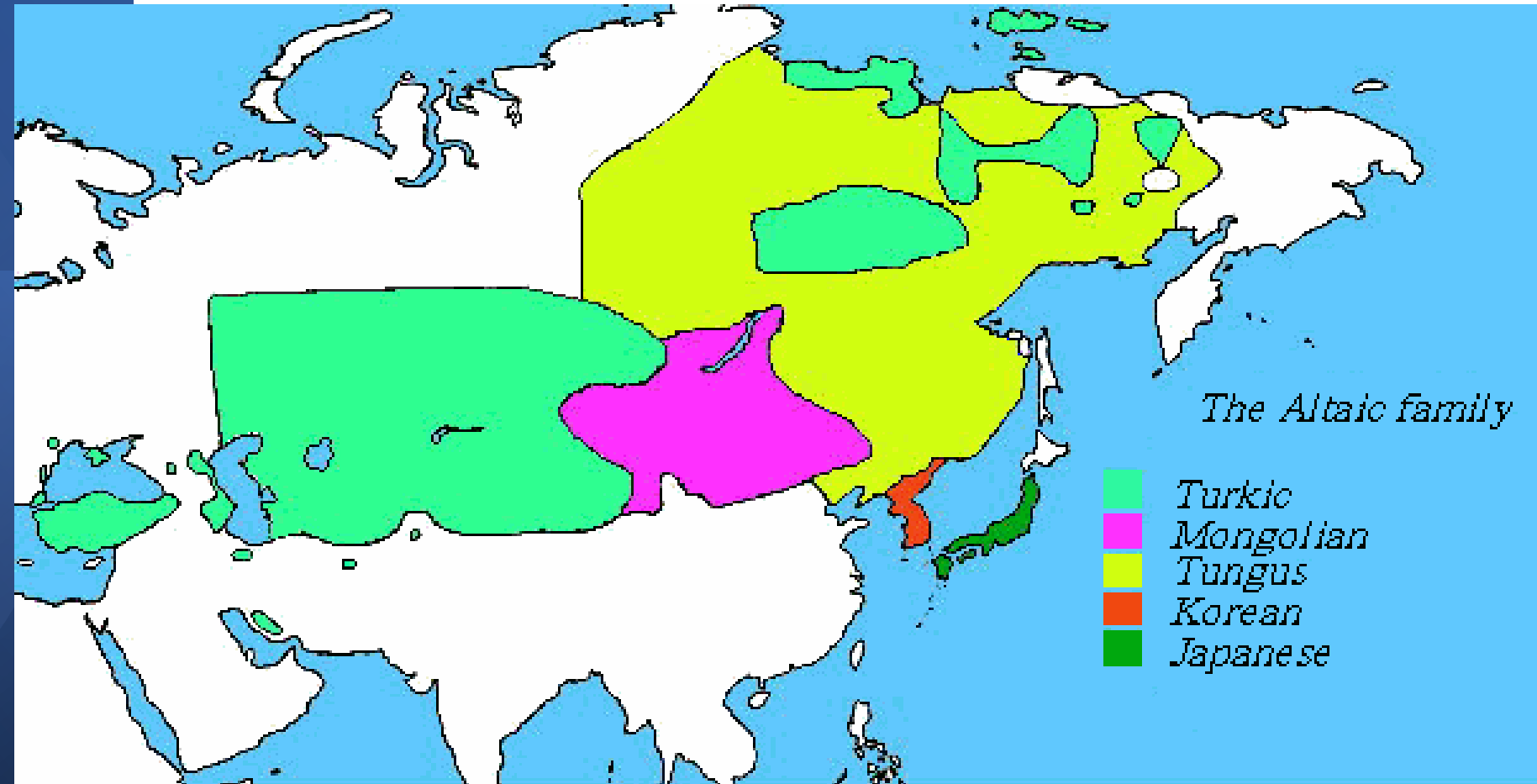


# Map of major language families



# Altaic Languages include Mongolian in some Turkic maps

Genetic studies suggest cultural diffusion more important than genetic diffusion in Turkic populations. In other words, Turkic languages and culture carried over into many groups.



# Major Language Families Percentage of World Population

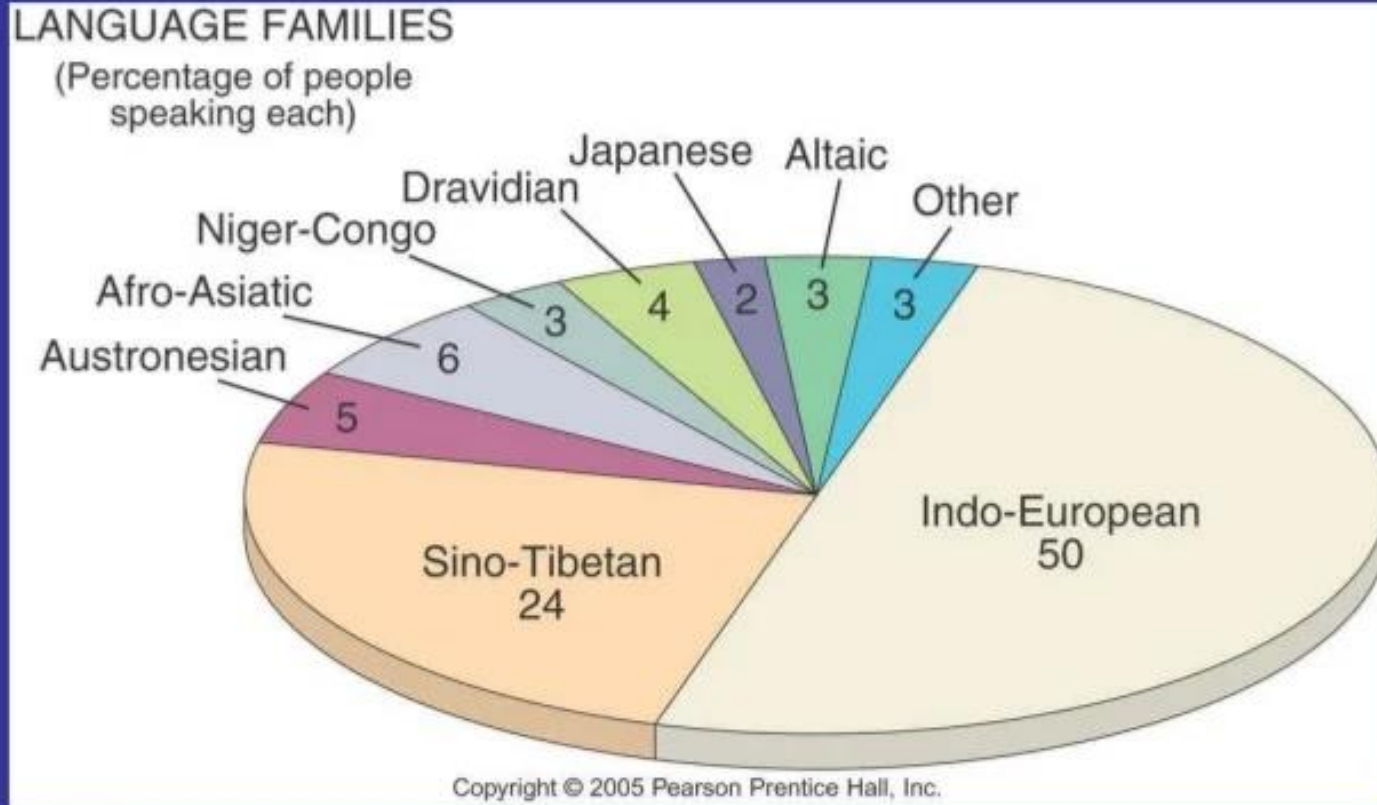


Fig. 5-11a: The percentage of world population speaking each of the main language families. Indo-European and Sino-Tibetan together represent almost 75% of the world's people.

Turkic/Altaic speakers are about 3% of the world total



Turkic Council  
members meeting  
2018  
(an earlier Turkish led  
version was not a  
success in the 1990s,  
reinvented in 2009  
under Kazakh  
leadership)



Cultivating Turkic heritage has grown in domestic Turkish culture.

Turkish Presidential Seal with Stars symbolizing the 16 Turkic States in World History

---

The seal dates from 1922, but until the 1980s was associated with Seljuk era beyliks, now associated with Turkic historic states.





2004  
stamp  
series of  
the 16  
Great  
Turkic  
states





The 16 have also been appearing in parks across Turkey in the past decade.





In 2015 Erdogan incorporated the 16 in an honor guard at the new Presidential Palace. The twitterscape went wild with memes.











The wolf, another image that has become part of contemporary symbolism of Turkey, appears throughout Mongolian/Turkic origin legends, but was revived in Turkic nationalist circles in late 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> c.

Petroglyph art, Kyrgyzstan



## TÜRKLERİN ERGENEKON'DAN ÇIKIŞLARI

Turkic mythology that was romanticized in the 1880s-1920s era was part of the early Turkish Republic iconography also.

The wolf, Asena, saved the Turks and lead them from the mythical valley of Ergenekon to found the first Turkic state.



*Ergenekon,*  
by Ibrahim  
Calli (active  
1920-47)





Ergenekon 2, by  
Tahir Burak, 1933

Ataturk was also  
called the “Blonde  
Wolf”



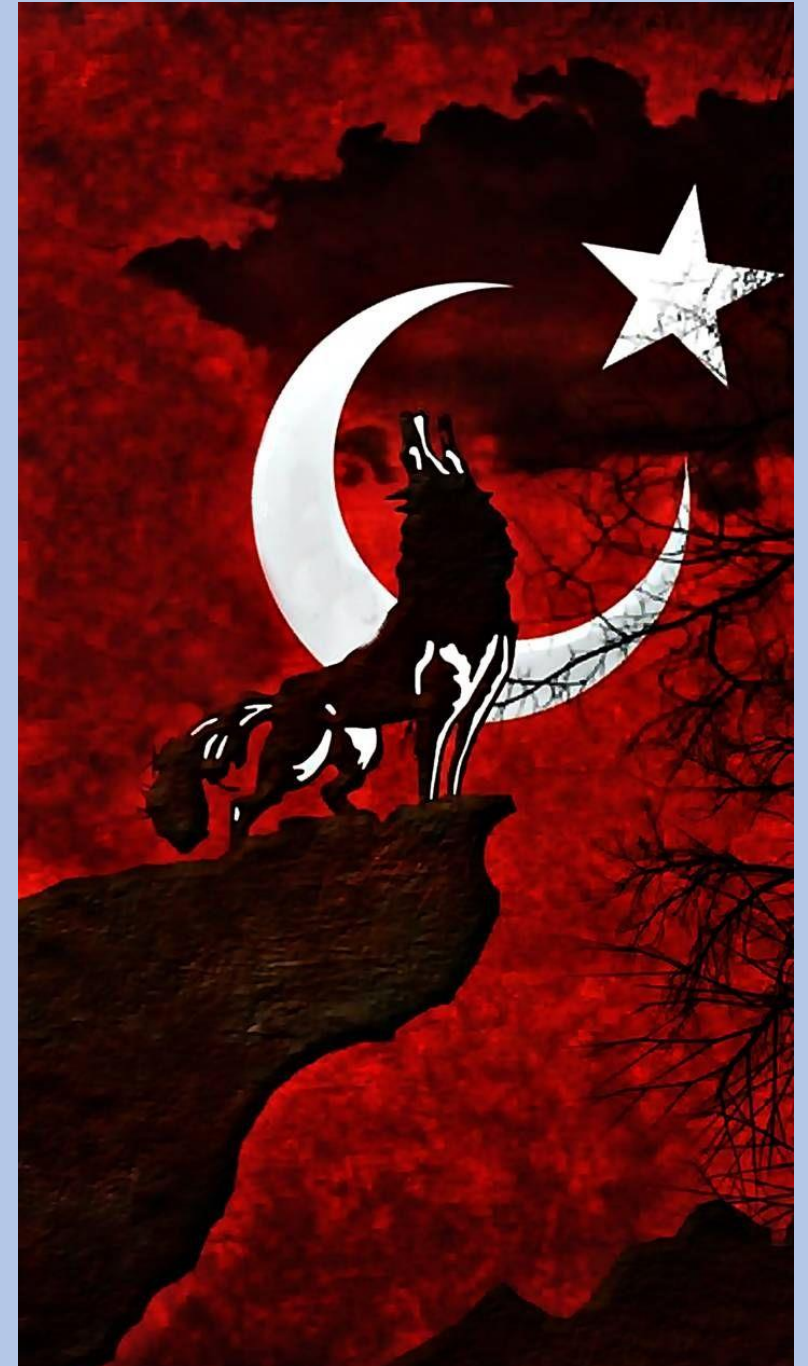


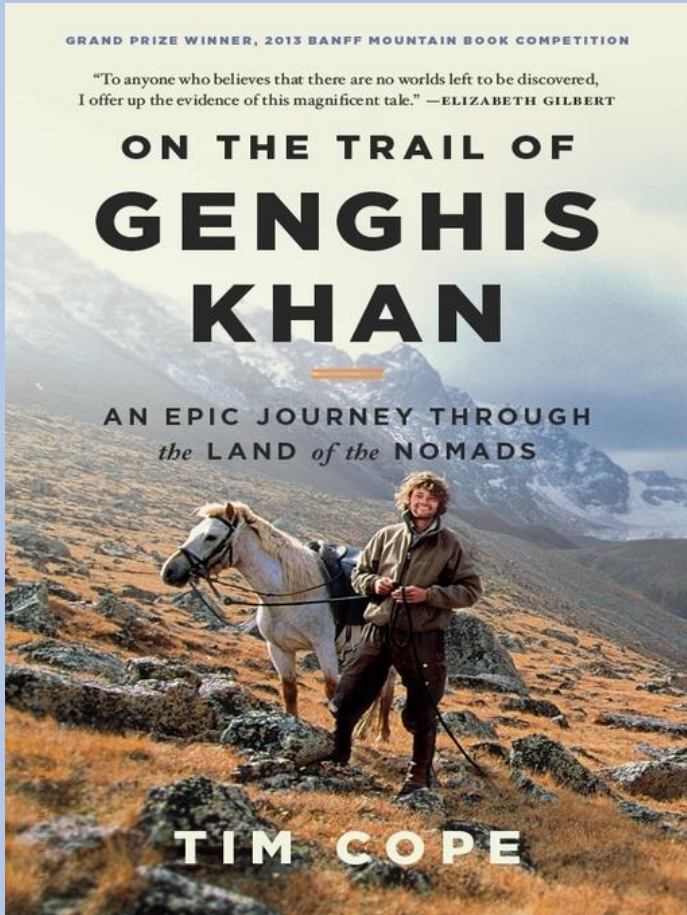


The Wolf is a popular but also controversial nationalist symbol today



Proposed 1925 seal of Turkey, never officially adopted.





For next week: Time to rethink nomadic culture, the horse and the steppes. I really loved this travel memoir by a young Australian who set out to cross from Mongolia to Hungary by horseback. He has wonderful commentary on the contemporary and historic Turkic worlds.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pGplzWFzOxw> (also a 30 minute national geo issue),

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FBFGLm5HwXY>