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## THE CONSTRUCTIVE ROLE OF CULTURE AND LANGUAGE IN HISTORICAL DISCOURSE

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**Abstract.** *Introduction.* This article critically examines the conceptual, historical and civilisational dimensions of history, culture and language, emphasising their inseparable and mutually constitutive nature. Moving beyond the positivist reduction of history to a mere chronological sequence of events, the article reconceptualises historiography as a purposeful, interpretive and culturally embedded discipline that constructs, mediates and transmits collective consciousness. By focusing on Turkish history and Turkology, the article shows that language preserves cultural memory, actively shapes identity formation, and ensures continuity across generations. *Goals and objectives.* The article aims to substantiate the argument that culture and language are the two foundational pillars that sustain historical existence and national cohesion. It elucidates the dynamic interaction between oral and written traditions, evaluates their epistemological status as historical sources, and highlights the methodological necessity of interdisciplinary enquiry. Drawing upon linguistics, archaeology, anthropology and ethnography, it addresses the chronological, hermeneutic and source-critical challenges inherent in reconstructing the past, particularly in contexts where written documentation is scarce or fragmentary. *Results.* The findings suggest that language plays a pivotal role in transmitting civilisational memory, including value systems, belief structures, social institutions, and symbolic forms, across generations. When subjected to rigorous source criticism and corroborated with material and textual evidence, oral sources can substantially enrich historical interpretation. *Conclusion.* Ultimately, the article contends that safeguarding linguistic and cultural heritage is indispensable for preserving national identity and strengthening historical resilience. It also advocates enhanced scholarly collaboration and integrative historiographical frameworks within the Turkic world.

**Keywords:** Historiography, Cultural memory, Linguistic continuity, Oral and written sources, Turkology, National Identity Formation, Interdisciplinary Historical Methodology

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## ТАРИХИ ДИСКУРСТАҒЫ МӘДЕНИЕТ ПЕН ТІЛДІҢ КОНСТРУКТИВТІК ҚЫЗМЕТІ

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**Аңдатпа.** *Kıriçne.* Мақалада тарих, мәдениет және тілдің концептуалдық, тарихи әрі өркениеттік қырлары сыни тұрғыдан зерделеніп, олардың өзара ажырамас, әрі бірін-бірі айқындайтын сипаты ғылыми негізде талданады. Тарихты – оқиғалардың жәй ғана хронологиялық тізбегі ретінде қарастыратын позитивтік ұстаным аясынан шыға отырып, авторлар тарихнаманы ұжымдық сананың қалыптасу үдерісін қамтамасыз ететін, оны әлеуметтік-мәдени кеңістікте қайта өндіретін және трансляциялайтын мәдени тұрғыдан тамырланған интерпретативтік пән ретінде қарастырады. Түрік тарихы мен түркология мәселелеріне сүйене отырып, мақалада тілдің мәдени жадты сақтаушы ғана емес, сонымен қатар ұлттық бірегейлікті қалыптастырушы және ұрпақтар сабақтастығын қамтамасыз етуші белсенді фактор екендігі дәлелденеді. *Мақсаты мен міндеттері.* Зерттеудің негізгі мақсаты – мәдениет пен тілдің тарихи болмысты және ұлттық тұтастықты қамтамасыз ететін іргелі екі тірек екендігін теориялық тұрғыдан негіздеу. Осы мақсатқа жету үшін мақалада ауызша және жазбаша дәстүрлердің өзара байланысы мен даму үдерісінің динамикалық сипаты ғылыми тұрғыдан қарастырылып, олардың тарихи дерек ретіндегі эпистемологиялық мәртебесі айқындалады, сондай-ақ пәнаралық тәсілдің әдіснамалық маңызы негізделеді. Лингвистика, археология, антропология және этнография салаларының деректеріне сүйене отырып, өткенді реконструкциялау барысында туындайтын хронологиялық, герменевтикалық және деректанулық мәселелер, әсіресе жазба деректердің жеткіліксіз немесе толық сақталмаған жағдайында туындайтын қиындықтарына қатысты мәселе жан-жақты талданады. *Нәтижелер.* Зерттеу нәтижелері тілдің өркениеттік жадты, соның ішінде құндылықтар жүйесін, діни сенімдерді, әлеуметтік институттарды және мәдениеттің символдық формаларын ұрпақтан-ұрпаққа жеткізудегі шешуші рөлін айқындайды. Деректанулық қатаң сыннан өткізіліп, материалдық және жазбаша деректермен салыстырылған ауызша деректер, тарихи интерпретацияны тереңдетіп, мазмұндық тұрғыдан байыта алатыны дәлелденеді. *Қорытынды.* Қорытындылай келе, тілдік және мәдени мұраны сақтау ұлттық бірегейлікті қорғаудың және тарихи тұрақтылықты нығайтудың қажетті шарты екендігі тұжырымдалады. Сонымен қатар түркі әлемі аясында ғылыми ынтымақтастықты кеңейту және интегративтік тарихнамалық тәсілдерді қалыптастырудың маңыздылығы негізделеді.

**Түйін сөздер:** Тарихнама, мәдени жад, тілдік сабақтастық, ауызша және жазбаша деректер, түркология, ұлттық бірегейлікті қалыптастыру, пәнаралық тарихи әдіснама

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## КУЛЬТУРА И ЯЗЫК КАК КОНСТРУКТИВНЫЕ ФАКТОРЫ ИСТОРИЧЕСКОГО ДИСКУРСА

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**Аннотация.** *Введение.* В настоящей статье предпринимается критический анализ концептуальных, исторических и цивилизационных измерений истории, культуры и языка с акцентом на их неразрывный и взаимоконституирующий характер. Выходя за рамки позитивистского подхода, сводящего историю к простой хронологической последовательности событий, авторы переосмысливают историографию как целенаправленную, интерпретативную и культурно укоренённую дисциплину, конструирующую, опосредующую и транслирующую коллективное сознание. Обращаясь к проблематике турецкой истории и тюркологии, в статье демонстрируется, что язык не только сохраняет культурную память, но и активно участвует в формировании идентичности, обеспечивая межпоколенческую преемственность. *Цели и задачи исследования.* Целью исследования является обоснование положения о том, что культура и язык выступают двумя фундаментальными основаниями, поддерживающими историческое бытие и национальную консолидацию. В статье раскрывается динамика взаимодействия устной и письменной традиций, определяется их эпистемологический статус в качестве исторических источников, а также подчёркивается методологическая необходимость междисциплинарного подхода. Опираясь на достижения лингвистики, археологии, антропологии и этнографии, авторы анализируют хронологические, герменевтические и источниковедческие проблемы, возникающие при реконструкции прошлого, особенно в условиях ограниченности или фрагментарности письменных свидетельств. *Результаты.* Полученные результаты свидетельствуют о том, что язык играет ключевую роль в передаче цивилизационной памяти, включая системы ценностей, религиозные представления, социальные институты и символические формы культуры. Устные источники, подвергнутые строгой источниковедческой критике и сопоставленные с материальными и письменными источниками, способны существенно обогатить и углубить историческую интерпретацию. *Заключение.* В заключение обосновывается, что сохранение языкового и культурного наследия является необходимым условием поддержания национальной идентичности и укрепления исторической устойчивости общества. Подчёркивается также важность расширения научного сотрудничества и разработки интегративных историографических подходов в рамках тюркского мира.

**Ключевые слова:** Историография, культурная память, языковая преемственность, устные и письменные источники, тюркология, формирование национальной идентичности, междисциплинарная историческая методология

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## Introduction

The interdependent relationship between history, culture and language constitutes one of the most fundamental yet theoretically insufficiently integrated fields of inquiry within contemporary humanities scholarship. Despite the evolution of historiography through positivist, structuralist, and postmodern paradigms, and the significant methodological transformations it has undergone, the constructive and constitutive role of culture and language in the formation of historical knowledge remains to be systematically conceptualised within a unified and comprehensive analytical framework. Conventional historical methodology has historically accorded primacy to political events, archival documentation, and chronological reconstruction in its attempts to delineate historical reality, frequently marginalising the epistemological and ontological status of linguistic continuity and cultural memory as formative forces in historical writing. Nevertheless, history cannot be considered a mere record of past events; rather, it is a dynamic field of consciousness in which meaning, identity, and collective memory are constructed, mediated, and reproduced through language.

In recent decades, the “linguistic turn” in historiography, alongside the integration of memory studies and interdisciplinary cultural research, has led to a significant expansion in the methodological scope of the field. These developments have convincingly demonstrated that historical narrative is not a neutral transmission of facts but an interpretive and constitutive practice. Nevertheless, a coherent theoretical model explaining how language and culture actively generate, mediate, legitimise, and sustain historical narratives across generations – particularly within the context of the Turkic world – remains underdeveloped. Despite the existence of numerous philological, archaeological, and ethnographic studies that have examined specific aspects of Turkish history and Turkology, there is a conspicuous absence of integrative scholarship that foregrounds language and culture as the two foundational pillars of historical existence and national cohesion. This lacuna constitutes the principal theoretical justification for the present research.

The etymological origins of the concept of history itself demonstrate its linguistic mediation. The Greek term *historia* initially denoted “inquiry through investigation” and “knowledge acquired by seeing” (Metin, 2004: 2–5), later evolving into the “narration of witnessed events” In the Eastern intellectual tradition, the corresponding term emphasises “determining the time of an event” thereby foregrounding temporality (Metin, 2004: 2–5). This conceptual evolution underscores the assertion that history comes into existence only through linguistic expression; that is to say, historical knowledge is narratively constructed.

Culture, in this sense, is posited as the foundational ground of historical existence. The Turkish Language Association defines culture as “the totality of material and spiritual values created in the course of historical and social development”, emphasising their transmission across generations (TDK, 2005: 1282). This definition indicates that culture is not merely an accumulation of values but a dynamic system that produces continuity, transformation, and meaning. As Güngör asserts, “Language functions as a bridge between a nation's past, present, and future” (Güngör, 1991: 61), thereby underscoring language as the principal agent of cultural continuity. Language is not merely a means of communication; it is the carrier of historical memory and a constitutive element of identity. Ergin defines language as “an entity that lives and develops according to its own internal laws” (Ergin, 1977: 1) and positions it as a social institution, revealing that language is not a passive instrument of transmission but an active structure shaping historical consciousness. Akar further emphasises that “there are very few languages in the world with as much historical depth and geographical breadth as Turkish” (Akar, 2015: 9), highlighting Turkish as a civilisational memory system.

The historical experience of the Turkic world, characterised by vast geographical dispersion, alphabet reforms, multilingual interactions, and the dynamic interplay between oral and written traditions, offers a compelling case for re-examining historiography beyond positivist reductionism (Ercilasun, 1993: 24), has observed that the formation of the Turkish nation dates back to centuries before Christ, thereby demonstrating the depth of historical continuity, which is not solely political but also linguistic and cultural. The evolution of writing systems and the presence of multiple languages have not hindered historical consciousness; instead, they have been instrumental in its transformation and rearticulation (Saray, 1987: 28). contends that Russification policies constituted deliberate interventions in identity, advocating that instead of a common Turkic-Tatar language, each tribe's dialect should be recognised as its mother tongue. This example illustrates the transformative impact of language policies on historical consciousness and civilisational cohesion.

Moreover, the role of oral culture in historiography necessitates further consideration within this theoretical framework (Dere, Dinç, 2020: 276) posit that “oral history constitutes a fundamental material of historiography in the process of making sense of the past” thereby underscoring the epistemological significance of oral sources. Oral narratives function not only as mechanisms of preservation and transmission but also as vehicles sustaining collective identity, value systems, and social memory. Consequently, historiography must not be confined to written documentation alone; it must be understood as a multilayered, culture-embedded field of consciousness shaped by linguistic and symbolic structures.

The enduring scholarly interest in collective memory, identity formation, and civilisational continuity further demonstrates the relevance of this inquiry. However, fundamental theoretical questions remain unanswered. The purpose of this study is to explore the function of language as a repository and transmitter of civilisational memory. The present study seeks to explore the manner in which oral and written traditions interact in shaping historiographical consciousness. The following question is posed for consideration: how can interdisciplinary methodologies address chronological, hermeneutic, and source-critical challenges, particularly in contexts characterised by fragmented or politically mediated documentation? The absence of comprehensive responses to these questions underscores the theoretical importance and practical necessity of the present study.

Consequently, this research conceptualises historiography as a dynamic, culture-embedded process of creating, interpreting, and transmitting knowledge about the past. This finding serves to reinforce the notion that culture and language represent two integral pillars that underpin historical existence and facilitate civilisational continuity. The central hypothesis of this study is that historical writing is structurally dependent upon the interplay between culture and language. The role of language in the transmission of historical reality is twofold: it serves to both reflect and shape that reality by conveying value systems, belief structures, social institutions, and symbolic forms across generations. Culture, in turn, provides the semantic and axiological framework within which language acquires meaning and historical narratives attain coherence.

In order to substantiate this argument, the study pursues several objectives: The following points are to be considered: firstly, a critical analysis of the etymological and conceptual evolution of the notion of history in Western and Eastern intellectual traditions; secondly, a conceptualisation of culture as the substantive content of historical experience and language as its primary medium of articulation and transmission; thirdly, an evaluation of the epistemological status and methodological reliability of oral and written sources in historical reconstruction; fourthly, an examination of the diachronic continuity of the Turkish language as a civilisational memory system; and fifthly, an emphasis on the methodological necessity of interdisciplinary approaches, integrating historiography, linguistics, archaeology, anthropology, and ethnography, in overcoming chronological and interpretative challenges. In conclusion, this study posits that historiography is not a neutral or purely descriptive enterprise; rather, it is a purposeful, interpretative, and linguistically mediated intellectual practice that actively constructs historical consciousness, reinforces collective identity, and safeguards civilisational continuity. Any historiographical approach that abstracts political events from their linguistic and cultural foundations remains epistemologically incomplete.

## Materials and Methods

This study draws on a wide and diverse range of materials to support its central thesis that culture and language play a key role in historical writing. These materials have been selected in accordance with the interdisciplinary nature of the research, and include written, oral, philological and historiographical sources.

Firstly, primary written sources form the basis of the analysis. These include early Turkic inscriptions (notably the Orkhon and Yenisei inscriptions), medieval historiographical works such as History of Reşid, Ottoman chronicles including History of Raşit, and classical lexicographical monuments such as Mahmud of Kaşgar's Dictionary of the Turkic Dialects. These texts are examined not merely as repositories of historical data, but as constructions mediated by language that encode civilisational memory, political ideology and cultural identity. Particular attention is paid to alphabet reforms, script transitions (Köktürk, Uighur, Arabic, Cyrillic and Latin) and lexical stratification, which are considered to be indicators of diachronic continuity and cultural transformation.

Secondly, the study incorporates a variety of oral sources, such as epic narratives (e.g. the Book of Dede Korkut), legends, proverbs, folk songs, autobiographical accounts and oral history interviews. These sources are considered dynamic carriers of collective memory and performative expressions of social consciousness. Rather than being regarded as secondary or auxiliary data, oral traditions are critically evaluated as epistemologically significant components of historiographical reconstruction.

Thirdly, the theoretical and methodological framework of the research is provided by secondary scholarly literature in historiography, Turkology, linguistics, anthropology, archaeology and memory studies. Works addressing the etymology of “history” in both Western and Eastern traditions, as well as studies on linguistic continuity and cultural transmission, are systematically analysed to situate the argument within broader academic discourse.

Finally, archaeological findings, particularly from Central Asia and the Altai region, are used to corroborate and contextualise both written and oral narratives within a material-historical framework. These findings strengthen the argument for the cultural and chronological unity of Turkic civilisation.

Due to the study's conceptual and interdisciplinary scope, a qualitative research design has been adopted. The methodological framework integrates several complementary approaches to ensure analytical rigour and theoretical coherence.

1. Conceptual and etymological analysis. The semantic evolution of the concepts of “history”, “culture”, and “language” is examined through diachronic lexical analysis. This method reveals how terminological changes reflect wider epistemological shifts in Western and Eastern intellectual traditions. By reconstructing the conceptual genealogy of these key terms, the study highlights their embeddedness in civilisation.

2. Hermeneutic interpretation. Written and oral texts are subjected to close reading and interpretive analysis. The hermeneutic method enables implicit value systems, symbolic structures and narrative strategies to be identified within historical discourse. In this context, language is not approached as a neutral instrument, but as a medium that generates meaning and shapes historical consciousness.

3. Comparative-Historical Method. A comparative framework is employed to examine continuities and divergences across different Turkic communities, time periods and script traditions. This method facilitates the identification of structural patterns in linguistic continuity, cultural transmission and historiographical representation. It also enables the study to emphasise the integrative nature of Turkic civilisation despite geographical dispersion and political fragmentation.

4. Source criticism and cross-verification. Written and oral materials are analysed through rigorous source criticism. The reliability, authorship, transmission context and ideological positioning of texts are critically assessed. Oral narratives are cross-checked with archaeological data, anthropological research and written documentation to mitigate chronological ambiguities and interpretative distortions. This triangulation strengthens the empirical validity of the findings.

5. **Interdisciplinary synthesis.** Recognising that historiography cannot operate in methodological isolation, the study draws on insights from linguistics, archaeology, anthropology and ethnography. Archaeological artefacts are used to substantiate cultural continuity, while linguistic analysis reveals patterns of semantic persistence and transformation. Anthropological perspectives, meanwhile, illuminate ritual, symbolic and identity-forming processes. This integrative approach addresses the chronological and evidentiary gaps that are often found in oral-dominant historical contexts.

6. **Diachronic and Synchronic Linguistic Analysis.** The Turkish language is examined both diachronically, to trace historical depth and structural continuity, and synchronically, to assess regional variation and interaction among Turkic dialects. This dual perspective highlights the dual role of language as a historical archive and a living communicative system.

The study deliberately transcends positivist reductionism by combining conceptual analysis, hermeneutics, comparative historiography and interdisciplinary triangulation. Rather than viewing historiography as a mere chronological enumeration of events, it conceptualises it as a culturally embedded and linguistically mediated process. This methodological approach allows the research to demonstrate that culture provides the substantive content of historical experience, while language structures its expression, preservation and transmission. Consequently, the study provides a comprehensive and critically informed framework for interpreting historical writing as a creative act influenced by civilisational memory and linguistic continuity.

## **Discussion**

### *History*

The Arabic-derived term “*tarih*” signifies “determining the time of an object or event”. In contrast, the Latin-derived term “*history*” conveys the meaning of “the story or narrative of events”.

The Greek word “*istoria*”, the primary source of equivalents in Western languages such as “*history*”, “*histoire*” and “*historia*”, originally meant “acquiring knowledge through inquiry or report” in the Ionic dialect, and “knowing by seeing, by witnessing” in the Attic dialect. Initially, the concept was used broadly to encompass “knowledge of nature”, ranging from geography to astronomy. However, with Herodotus, the term was redefined as “the narration of things witnessed and heard”, thereby assuming the role of documenting human and social events. Thucydides further transformed the concept by incorporating the activities of “evaluation and interpretation”, thus constructing the semantic foundation of its modern meaning.

Examining the roots of the concept in the Eastern intellectual tradition, the word *tarih* is traced to the common Semitic root v-r-h. This etymological basis inherently conveys the meaning of “the date of the month”, simultaneously fulfilling the function of determining and establishing the time of an event, and emphasising the precise moment and temporal framework of its occurrence (Metin, 2004: 2–5).

From a social science perspective, the concept of history encompasses all knowledge produced through systematic and scientific research into the past and present experiences of societies, nations or humanity as a whole.

As a discipline, history provides societies with an understanding of their origins and their future direction. In doing so, it fosters a sense of collective identity. For this reason, historical research plays a decisive and indispensable role in shaping societies' cultural policies.

The experiences of a nation in the past must be recorded for the benefit of future generations. The fundamental purpose of history is not just to document events, but also to preserve, enrich and pass on a nation's cultural values, thereby providing guidance and direction.

Historical thought is inherently purposive. Like other scholars, historians consider the future in their intellectual work. After asking “*Why?*”, they inevitably seek an answer to “*Where to?*”. In this way, they illuminate the path forward, endowing the future with perspective through their critical interpretation of the past.

### *Culture*

According to the Turkish Dictionary of the Turkish Language Association (TDK), culture is defined as follows:

1. “The totality of all material and spiritual values created in the course of historical and social development, together with the instruments used in creating and transmitting them to subsequent generations, reflecting the degree of human mastery over the natural and social environment; cultivation; refinement”. 2. The entirety of intellectual and artistic works specific to a society or community of people (TDK, 2005: 1282). Examining the concept of culture etymologically reveals that it derives from the Latin verb *colere* and the noun “*cultura*”, which originally signified “cultivation” or “tilling the soil”. This semantic root reveals the transformative power of human intervention – the deliberate act of shaping, nurturing and refining. By proposing the term *ekin* in place of *tarım*, the Turkish Language Association sought to indigenise the concept in accordance with its primary meaning. Thus, within Turkish intellectual discourse, culture has come to be articulated as the seed that generates and advances civilisations.

The lived realities of a nation from past to present are constituted by its mode of perceiving the world, the ideas it formulates, the behaviours it embodies, the attitudes it adopts, the knowledge it produces, the aesthetic values it gradually constructs, the social structures it establishes, its religious practices, and the moral, legal, economic and technological systems it develops, together with its historical consciousness regarding its own existence. This comprehensive and dynamic totality is what we designate as culture.

Culture is one of the two foundational elements that generate history; the other is language, through which culture is formed, expressed and transmitted.

Even in prehistoric times, long before the invention of writing, human beings transmitted events and past experiences orally, thereby acquiring and disseminating knowledge. However, with the invention of writing, the concept of history began to evolve systematically, transforming collective memory into a structured and enduring record.

### *Language*

According to the Turkish Dictionary of the Turkish Language Association (TDK), “language” is defined as follows: 1. The fleshy, elongated and mobile organ in the mouth that enables tasting, swallowing and the articulation of sounds; the organ of taste. 2. The system through which human beings convey their thoughts and feelings by means of words or signs; the tongue; speech” (TDK, 2005: 526). “Language is a natural medium that enables communication among human beings; a living entity endowed with its own intrinsic laws and capable of developing only within the framework of those laws; a system of implicit agreements whose foundations were laid in unknown times; a social institution woven from sounds” (Ergin, 1977: 1). Language is a living, dynamic organism that carries and transmits the material and spiritual culture of societies.

### *Historiography*

Historiography develops and matures through the oral and written sources upon which it feeds. Contemporary interdisciplinary approaches no longer view the oral tradition as a practice that existed only in the past and has since disappeared. Instead, they recognise that the oral tradition has a far more meaningful and dynamic relationship with written culture. History does not consist solely of events that have occurred; it is a phenomenon that is reinterpreted in every generation. Culture and language shape Turkish history and civilisation, carrying them from the past to the present and into the future.

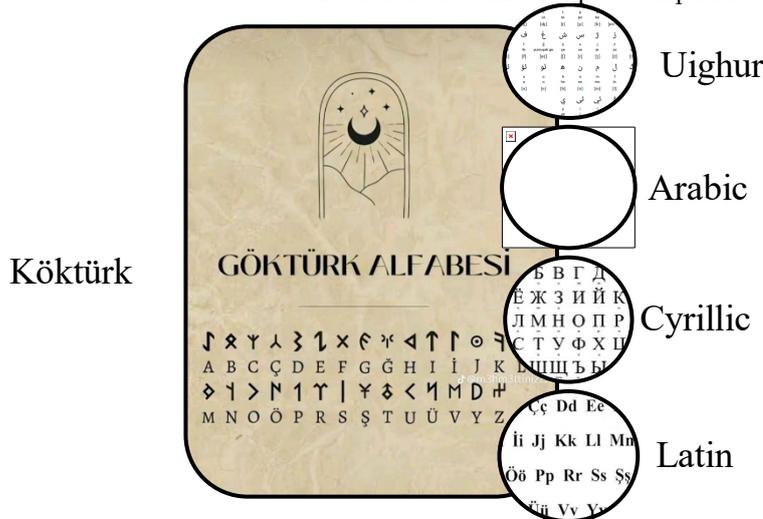
The most essential feature illuminating the depths of history is the inseparability of culture and language. Language is not merely a tool of communication; it is the fundamental carrier of culture, carrying the historical memory of communities, constructing their cultural identities and perpetually sustaining the bond between the past and the future. “There are very few languages in the world that possess the historical depth and geographical breadth of the Turkish language” (Akar, 2015: 9). The wide geographical dispersion of Turkic-speaking peoples and their long history have made the Turkish language an unparalleled source of diachronic and synchronic data for historical research. Turkological studies therefore do not confine themselves solely to grammatical analysis and lexical

documentation, but also undertake multilayered cultural analyses to firmly establish the migration routes, social structures and historical affiliations of the Turkish nation.

#### *Written sources*

The principal corpus of written sources comprises inscriptions, decrees, laws, court records, notarial documents, newspapers and journals. The earliest written documents in Turkish history are the Orkhon Inscriptions. These inscriptions are considered the title deeds of the Turkish nation. Erected along the banks of the Orkhon River in Mongolia during the 7th and 8th centuries, these monuments date to the reign of the Köktürk ruler Kutluk Khagan and present the earliest examples of the Turkish language and consequently, Turkish history. The alphabet used in the Orkhon inscriptions is the oldest known Turkish alphabet. Throughout history, the Turkish nation has utilised the Köktürk, Uighur, Arabic, Cyrillic and Latin alphabets (table-1).

Table – 1. Evolution of Turkic Scripts: Comparative diagram



Through meticulous evaluation of oral and written sources, the history of the Turkish language has been reconstructed and Turkish history itself has been reshaped. In the eighteenth century, the first systematic documentation of the Turkic languages was the result of empirical observations carried out in Siberia by Swedish officers. Filip Johan von Strahlenberg's seminal work, published in 1730, is widely regarded as one of the earliest foundational contributions to the institutionalisation of Turkology and the conceptualisation of Ural-Altaic philological studies.

Ultimately, these scholarly efforts culminated in the discovery and decipherment of the Orkhon Inscriptions. On 18 July 1889, Nikolai Yadrintsev's discovery of the monumental stone stelae in the Orkhon Valley was celebrated as the most significant achievement in the history of Turkology (Johanson, 2001: 5).

The fact that the symbols inscribed on these monuments corresponded to the 'runic'-like signs previously found in Siberia was of immense significance to the scholarly world. On 15 December 1893, the Danish scholar Vilhelm Thomsen conclusively demonstrated in his groundbreaking study that these inscriptions belonged to 8th-century Eastern Old Turkish. Thus, the historical depth of the Turkish language and the profound antiquity of Turkish history were firmly established.

The Old Turkish period encompasses the Köktürk, Uighur and Karakhanid written languages of Eastern Turkish, as well as the Tuna Bulgar phase of Western Turkish. Based on current knowledge, the earliest written document of the Köktürk period of the Turkish language is the Çoyren Inscription (687–692), which dates to the 7th century.

The integrity of cultural history is likewise of paramount importance. For instance, from a cultural historical perspective, Kazakhstan has a very ancient history. The artefacts crafted from various metals that have been unearthed during archaeological excavations in Kazakhstan display motifs that resemble those of the Yenisei region. The steppes of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan bear cultural traces of the Yenisei Turkish civilisation. The burial mounds (kurgans) at Sarig-Kol,

Çingiz-Tag and Berkkarin, which date back to the Hunnic period in Kazakhstan, have yielded artefacts, tombstones, rock inscriptions and tamgas that are identical to those found in the Yenisei region (Gömeç, 2003: 70). Such evidence powerfully demonstrates that Turkish history must be approached and interpreted as an indivisible whole.

#### *Oral sources*

The principal types of oral sources are epics, stories, legends, idioms, proverbs, anecdotes, folk songs, audio recordings, interviews with living witnesses, diary entries, autobiographies, and customs and traditions. These materials are referred to today as oral history. Houses, castles, temples, paintings, sculptures, weapons and everyday objects also serve as sources for oral history.

“In the process of historical writing, oral history functions as one of the fundamental materials traditionally utilised by historians, serving as a source for historical narrative by fulfilling various roles in the process of making sense of the past” (Dere, Dinç, 2020: 276). Culture and language are the two most essential pillars in this process of bringing the memory of society to the surface.

When archival texts are produced, the voice of the individual narrator is often attenuated, for folklore archives deliberately filter out original interactional contexts in order to transform oral tradition into a collective representation (Anttonen, et al., 2018: 163). Consequently, when oral narratives are placed upon archival shelves, they cease to be pure performances and instead become texts constructed by written culture and endowed with academic legitimacy (Anttonen, et al., 2018: 8). Historians, therefore, must evaluate these texts with full awareness that they are representations mediated through the filter of written culture.

Oral history transcends the academic boundaries of conventional historiography by rendering collective memory visible through individual narratives and by reinterpreting the past in light of present experiences. This approach places culture and language at the very center of historical transmission. Indeed, oral history studies “offer a rich texture of personal memories, emotions, and cultural insights,” thereby enabling a more profound understanding of historical events and social transformations (Addanan, Aziz, 2025: 6). As living carriers of cultural identity, oral records complete what remains deficient in written historiography. Where written documents prove insufficient, oral sources decisively fill the void.

“Let us not forget that history is a graveyard of states”. Countless states have been founded, risen and collapsed. What endures eternally is the institutionalised and integrated condition of a lineage – that is, the nation. Nations survive in proportion to the strength of their social structure and their ability to withstand internal and external threats. A nation, being the result of the integration of a lineage, does not easily perish. The science of history presents events to us chronologically. The fundamental duty of history, provided impartiality is upheld, is to record events based on time, place and those involved, with a firm grounding in documentary evidence. In doing so, it naturally dwells upon cause-and-effect relationships (Tural, 1991: 191–192).

“The formation of our nation extends back eighteen centuries before Christ. Archaeological findings in the Altai Mountains reveal abundant examples of the present-day Turkish type. The cultural artefacts discovered there are completely similar to those used by Turks living in both Anatolia and Asia today. According to Prof. Dr. Zeki Velidi Togan, the first political formation of Turkdom mentioned in written historical sources was the Sakas. The Saka ruler Efrâsiyab, who died in 625 BCE, is our renowned epic hero Alp Er Tunga. In the third century BCE, we encounter the Huns and Mete. Following the Huns, the continuity of the Turkish state was maintained by the Topas, Avars, Göktürks, Uighurs, Karakhanids, Seljuks, Ilkhanids, Timurids and Ottomans” (Ercilasun, 1993: 24).

Although only a limited number of texts have survived from the seventh century, Turkish functioned as a unified written language from the eighth to the thirteenth century. This stage of the language, which encompasses the Köktürk, Uighur and Karakhanid periods, is conventionally referred to as “Old Turkish”. For centuries, Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Uzbek, Uyghur, Tatar and Turkmen communities, together with other Turkic groups, employed a common written standard. From a grammatical standpoint, the differences between these varieties were minimal. However, lexical variation emerged primarily as a consequence of religious and cultural affiliations: Sanskrit

vocabulary entered Uighur texts, whereas Arabic and Persian elements became prominent in Karakhanid works.

Naturally, distinct geographical regions exhibited corresponding dialectal variations. In the eleventh century, Maḥmūd al-Kāšgarī travelled among twenty-four Turkic tribes while writing his monumental *Dīwān Luġāt at-Turk* (1072–1074). In the introduction to his work, he states that he travelled extensively “throughout the cities and steppes” of Turkic lands, studying their dialects and poetic forms, including those of the Turks, the Turkmen-Oghuz, the Čigil, the Yağma and the Qırqız (Golden, 2015: 504–514).

After the 13th century, the Oghuz who migrated to Anatolia were unfamiliar with the written language that Kaşgarlı Mahmud had termed Hakaniye and communicated solely through their spoken tongue. They began to adopt Arabic and Persian, the languages of the new geography into which they had settled. An Oghuz variety grounded in oral tradition already existed. The beys of the Beylik period, like the common people, spoke the pure Oghuz vernacular. Consequently, over time, views were advanced advocating the predominance of this language everywhere, and Karamanoğlu Mehmet Bey issued a decree: “Henceforth, in the court, in the council, and in all places, no language other than Turkish shall be used...”. Thus, a second written language emerged. Our linguistic divergences stem from this development.

Pursuing a policy of Russification aimed at dismantling the unity of the Muslim Turks of Turkestan who employed the Arabic script, İlminsky, on 25 May 1926, proposed the adaptation of the Russian alphabet to the distinct dialects used by the Turks and “advocated that, instead of a common Turkish-Tatar language, the dialect of each tribe be recognized as its mother tongue” (Saray, 1987: 28). In this manner, eighteen different alphabets were created for the Turkic tribes.

*Why is it important for a nation to preserve its language, culture, history and traditions?*

Individuals' ability to sustain their lives without becoming alienated from the society in which they live – to adapt to it, in other words – depends on their internalisation of that society's culture, beliefs and values. This internalisation is transmitted across generations through language. Language is one of the fundamental elements that constitute culture.

A human being is born into a language and shaped by it. They perceive the world through that language and acquire the capacity for reasoning through it. Language is the essential precondition for the realisation of thought. Thought cannot take form independently of language. Even ideas that arise in the human mind without being verbalised ultimately emerge and become manifest through language.

“Through their written and oral works, earlier generations communicate with new generations. By examining these cultural artefacts, the latter learn about the life experiences, beliefs and values of their ancestors. By adding their own experiences to this accumulation, they endeavour to transmit culture to future generations through their own works. Thus, language functions as a bridge linking the past, present, and future in the life of a nation” (Güngör, 1991: 61).

“When individuals belonging to the same nation assign the same names to objects, actions, and concepts, and when relationships among words and word order are established in the same way, a sense of closeness emerges. This closeness, resulting from the use of a common language together with shared values such as religion, culture, tradition and history, ensures the formation and continuity of a nation” (Güngör, 1991: 61).

Without a consciousness of nationhood, a society faces the threat of disappearance. The most vital element that sustains a nation is its language. Through language, concepts and values are formed and consolidated. For example, the *Book of Dede Korkut* reflects the shared culture of the Turkish people, regardless of where they live. The *Dede Korkut* narratives transferred the dynamism of the oral tradition into written culture by filtering it through the settled, Islamic cultural milieu of the 15th and 16th centuries. These richly layered works, produced in the Turkish language, play a crucial role in enabling us to interpret history more profoundly and in instilling our cultural identity in new generations.

For the sixteenth-century historian Muhammed Haydar Dulatî, who defined history as the manifestation of God on earth, language was also the most important symbol of cultural identity. He

did not merely regard the Turkish language as a vehicle of communication; he also saw it as a repository of cultural memory. Dulatî's philosophy of language is notable for his characterisation of Turkish as the ontological basis of cultural identity: He describes Turkish not simply as a means of communication, but as “the home of historical memory” (Osanova, 2023: 121). The deliberate use of over one hundred Turkish words in *Tarikh-i Rashidi* demonstrates his conscious endeavour to preserve the linguistic continuity of Turkic identity. “The Turkish words appearing in *Tarikh-i Rashidi* considerably outnumber those in contemporary texts written in Chagatai Turkish. This preference reveals Dulatî's deliberate effort to elevate the Turkish language to the status of a literary and scholarly instrument” (Nurysheva, Myrzabekov, 2017: 35-48). Muhammed Haydar Dulati is an intellectual bridge who rearticulated the historical consciousness and cultural identity of the Turko-Islamic civilisation. His *Tarikh-i Rashidi* is one of the few works to integrate historiography with philosophy, ethics and aesthetics.

Culture (*ekin*) and language are the two most fundamental pillars in transmitting historical knowledge to future generations. They are indispensable elements that bear witness to the past. *Tarikh-i Râşid*, written by Raşit Efendi and published by İbrahim Müteferrika in 1741, is one of the most important examples of Ottoman historiography in book form. The process of reproducing and preserving it in the modern world demonstrates how history is documented through written sources. As the sources indicate, the original work's integrity was meticulously maintained during the digitisation process, with the pages being digitised exactly as they were (Efendi, 1741: 1). This method preserves the historical evolution of language and the manner in which spiritual values were inscribed into written text, thereby providing historians with primary data unmediated by later interpretations (table-2).

Table – 2. Analytical Framework for History, Culture and Language in Civilisational Continuity

Analytical Dimension	History (Historiography)	Culture	Language	Integrated Implication for Civilisational Continuity
Etymological Foundation	<i>Istoria</i> (inquiry, witnessing); <i>tarih</i> (determination of temporal occurrence)	From Latin <i>colere/cultura</i> (cultivation, refinement); semantic field of formation and transformation	Social institution woven from sound; system of implicit conventions; dynamic organism	Historical consciousness emerges through linguistic mediation within culturally structured meaning systems
Ontological Status	Interpretative reconstruction of past events	Totality of material and spiritual values; normative and symbolic order	Living archive of collective memory	History exists as a linguistically articulated cultural construct rather than as a purely chronological record
Epistemological Function	Produces knowledge through narration, evaluation, and causal explanation	Generates frameworks of meaning (moral, aesthetic, institutional)	Codifies, transmits, and stabilises meaning	Historical knowledge is structurally dependent on linguistic articulation shaped by cultural codes
Temporal Function	Connects past, present, and future through purposive interpretation	Ensures continuity of identity across generations	Preserves diachronic continuity despite script and lexical change	Civilisational endurance is sustained through linguistic and cultural continuity rather than political permanence
Source Base	Written documents; oral testimony; archaeological evidence	Rituals, traditions, symbolic systems, social institutions	Oral narratives, inscriptions, literary works, archival texts	Triangulation of oral, written, and material sources strengthens historiographical reliability

Oral Tradition	Expands experiential and affective dimensions of the past	Preserves collective values and identity	Transmits memory through narrative performance	Oral history complements written historiography and restores suppressed voices
Written Tradition	Institutionalises and stabilises historical memory	Codifies cultural norms and institutional practices	Fixes linguistic forms in script (e.g., Köktürk, Uighur, Arabic, Latin alphabets)	Script transitions reconfigure but do not terminate historical consciousness
Case Illustration (Turkic World)	Reconstruction of Turkish history through inscriptions and philological analysis	Cultural unity across Central Asia, Anatolia, and the Altai region	Grammatical continuity from Old Turkish to modern Turkic varieties	Demonstrates resilience of civilisation through linguistic-structural continuity
Interdisciplinary Dimension	Integrates archaeology, philology, anthropology, and ethnography	Interprets symbolic and ritual practices	Provides diachronic and synchronic data	Methodological triangulation mitigates ideological distortion and chronological ambiguity
Identity Formation	Constructs and legitimises national memory	Shapes shared values and collective belonging	Functions as ontological basis of cultural identity	Language and culture operate as strategic instruments of historical sustainability

## Results

The findings of this study strongly support the central hypothesis that historiography is structurally and epistemologically rooted in the dynamic interplay of culture and language. Data obtained through conceptual analysis, diachronic linguistic examination, comparative historical evaluation and interdisciplinary triangulation demonstrate that historical consciousness cannot be explained solely by the chronological sequencing of events. Rather, it is shaped by a linguistic and cultural construction process.

Firstly, the etymological development of the concept of “history” in Western and Eastern intellectual traditions shows that historical knowledge has always been formed through language. The evolution of the Greek term “istoria” to mean “knowledge acquired through inquiry” or “knowing by seeing”, and the semantic framework of the term “tarih” in the Eastern tradition, meaning “determining the time of an event”, show that historical knowledge cannot be conceived independently of processes of narration, interpretation and meaning-making. Indeed, as (Metin, 2004: 2–5) notes, “the semantic field of the term history expanded from the act of acquiring knowledge to the conscious transmission of events”. This finding unequivocally indicates that historiography is ontologically dependent upon linguistic mediation.

Secondly, examining the linguistic continuity from Old Turkic to contemporary Turkic dialects shows that Turkish acts as a ‘civilisational memory system’. Structural continuity extending from the Göktürk, Uighur and Karakhanid periods to Ottoman Turkish and modern Turkic dialects demonstrates that the linguistic core has been preserved despite political ruptures and alphabet reforms. Akar’s assertion that “few languages possess the historical depth and geographical breadth of Turkish” (Akar, 2015: 9) further supports the notion that this continuity is civilisational as well as philological in scope. This strongly confirms that language is a living archive that carries historical continuity, not merely a means of communication.

Thirdly, a comparative analysis of written and oral sources establishes the epistemological legitimacy of the oral tradition in historiography. Dere and Dinç emphasise that “oral history constitutes one of the fundamental materials of historiography in the process of interpreting the past” (Dere, Dinç, 2020: 276), thereby highlighting the role of oral narratives in historical construction. In this context, epic narratives, proverbs and accounts preserved in popular memory sustain collective identity, value systems and symbolic structures in a vivid form while incorporating experiential

dimensions, which are absent from written documents, into historical interpretation. (Addanan, Aziz, 2025: 6) argue that oral history studies offer a rich texture in terms of personal memories, emotions, and cultural insights', thereby demonstrating that oral culture is not an alternative to written history, but rather a complementary epistemological field.

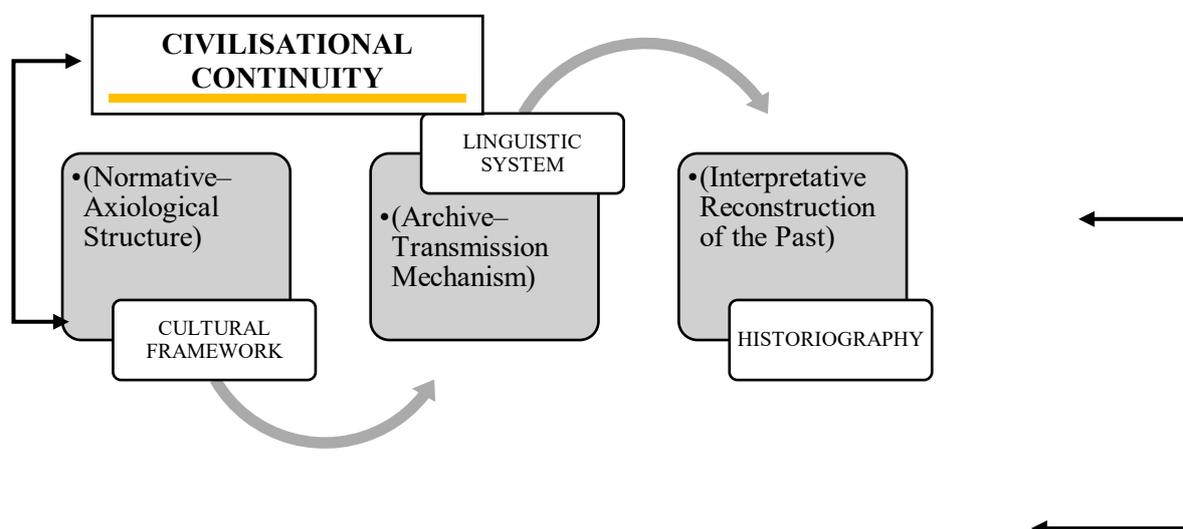
Fourthly, it has been determined that an interdisciplinary approach strengthens historical interpretation. The convergence of archaeological findings in the Altai and Central Asia with evidence of linguistic and cultural continuity demonstrates that Turkish history should be viewed holistically rather than in isolation. When evaluating the cultural similarities found in kurgans in Kazakhstan and the Yenisei region, Gömeç observes that “the same cultural elements are encountered across broad geographies” (Gömeç, 2003: 70), thus supporting this holistic perspective. Consequently, integrating archaeological, anthropological and linguistic data reduces chronological uncertainties and minimises ideological distortions.

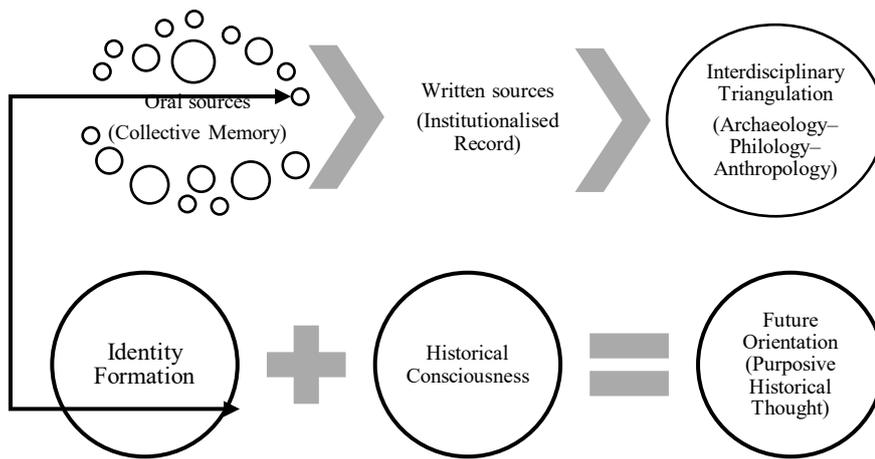
Fifth, it has been clearly demonstrated that culture gives meaning to historical experience, while language structures and transmits this meaning across generations. Güngör's assertion that “language functions as a bridge between a nation's past and future” (Güngör, 1991: 61) highlights the pivotal role of language in historical continuity. Similarly, Muhammad Haydar Dulati's description of Turkish as “the home of historical memory” (Ospanova, 2023: 121), coupled with his deliberate use of Turkish vocabulary in his work, suggests that language was employed strategically as a means of constructing identity. Nurysheva and Myrzabekov's finding that “the number of Turkish words in *Tarikh-i Rashidi* is significantly higher than in contemporary Chagatai texts” (Nurysheva, Myrzabekov, 2017: 35–48) further highlights the historical and ideological significance of this deliberate choice.

Sixthly, it has been established that historiography is not a neutral, purely descriptive activity, but rather an interpretive practice that constructs collective memory, legitimises identity and directs the future. Tural's assertion that “history is obliged to record events within the framework of time, space, and person, based on documents” (Tural, 1991: 191–192) articulates the discipline's claim to objectivity, while also implicitly acknowledging the meaning-producing function of the act of recording. In this sense, historiography does not merely document the past; it shapes collective consciousness, consolidates identity and determines social orientation.

In conclusion, the findings decisively demonstrate that culture and language are not peripheral elements of historiography, but constitute its foundational core. Language preserves the past as a living archive of civilisation, while culture provides the semantic and axiological basis for historical narratives. Together, these two elements ensure the continuity of civilisation beyond political structures, strengthen collective identity and transform the past into a constitutive element of the present and future (Diagram – 1).

Diagram – 1. A Conceptual Framework for the Civilisational Construction of Historiography, Collective Memory and Identity Formation





### Conclusion

In conclusion, two fundamental elements undoubtedly consolidate a nation's existence, continuity and identity throughout history: culture and language. These two components meticulously weave the fabric of collective memory, creating an unbroken continuity stretching from the past into the future. Language, as both the creator and carrier of culture, and culture, as the primary source that refines and enriches the semantic universe of language, stand together as the most reliable witnesses of history.

Oral literature and mythology generate collective memory, emerging as vital instruments for articulating a society's worldview. Even communities without written records can have their history reconstructed through oral tradition. In this regard, modern Turkological research must view language as more than just a structure to be described; it is a key that reveals the culture and history of societies.

In the process of historiography, culture and language are two complementary parts of an integrated whole. While culture shapes the substance of history, language determines its form and governs how it is passed on. One of the most significant challenges in oral traditions is the issue of chronology. The most fundamental way to resolve chronological issues is to approach historical enquiry alongside other scientific disciplines. In the absence of written documentation, historians must rigorously employ data from archaeology, linguistics, anthropology and ethnography, critically scrutinising elements of oral culture under interdisciplinary supervision. In particular, archaeological findings and written records furnish concrete evidence that anchors events transmitted through oral tradition within specific temporal frameworks. Chronological gaps can be filled by comparing the narratives of different communities or distinct branches of the same society. "Elements within traditions must be cross-checked with other traditions, anthropological studies and archaeological data" (Muraina, 2015: 20). This comparative methodology reveals consistencies among narratives and plays a decisive role in establishing historical reality.

Language is like an inexhaustible spring, flowing from the past into the future. Language accompanies the entire existence of the human race. Although people feel more deeply connected to the spirit of their own time through language, they can also vividly and clearly perceive and sense the distant past. Language unites these two sentiments. After all, it has passed through the emotions of earlier generations, whose breaths remain concealed within it. These generations are connected to us through the sounds of our mother tongue, a manifestation of emotion (Akarsu, 1998: 21). History attains meaning through the combination of the emotional depth of oral tradition and the impartial precision of written culture. "The foremost indicator of a society's independence is undoubtedly its possession of a spoken language. If a language other than a country's native tongue does not hold official status, that state is independent" (Gömeç, 2003: 15). In independent states, objective historiography can flourish.

Tracing the imprints of the past in the process of writing history requires a cumulative social consciousness. Above all, oral history introduces life into history, enriching its content and expanding

its framework. By unveiling personal testimonies and lived experiences preserved in memory, this method enables societies to rewrite their histories.

As intellectuals of the Turkic world, our most essential responsibility is to nurture a generation that embraces a shared language, culture and, consequently, historical past. The path towards this goal lies in creating common history textbooks. Efforts are currently underway to establish a common alphabet, and we hope that in the near future, we will also attain a common spoken and written language. This will enable us to develop a more coherent and comprehensive historiography of the Turkish past.

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