

Choice of Script as a Mark of Cultural or/and National Identity

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Ogni lingua può essere rappresentata con qualunque sistema grafico. L'adozione di una scrittura deriva in gran parte da ragioni extralinguistiche ed è un interessante indizio di aspetti culturali, religiosi, politici della storia di un popolo. Presenteremo due esempi, lontani nel tempo e nello spazio, come spunto per ulteriori riflessioni. Il primo esempio è quello del popolo ebraico: già dal V secolo a.C. la lingua ebraica cedette il posto all'aramaico come lingua parlata, rimanendo lingua letteraria e liturgica. Con la diaspora, gli ebrei adottarono la lingua del luogo: si parla perciò di giudeo-arabo, giudeo-persiano, giudeo-italiano, giudeo-spagnolo ecc.

La più antica scrittura ebraica è affine a quella fenicia, ma con l'adozione dell'aramaico come lingua gli ebrei ne assunsero anche l'alfabeto, la cosiddetta "scrittura quadrata". Solo in alcuni rari casi si ricorreva all'antico alfabeto fenicio, per ragioni religiose (scrivere il nome di Dio) o politiche (iscrizioni su monete).

In seguito, pur adottando le lingue del luogo dove vivevano, gli ebrei usavano però scriverle quasi sempre con l'alfabeto quadrato. Questo fenomeno si prolunga nel tempo fino al caso più recente dello yiddish, il dialetto alto-tedesco degli ebrei dell'Europa orientale, sempre di preferenza scritto in caratteri ebraici. L'appartenenza religiosa ed etnica, nel caso del popolo ebraico in epoca antica e medievale, sembra quindi che si esprima in modo privilegiato con la scelta di usare il proprio alfabeto.

Il secondo esempio riguarda le lingue turche dell'Asia centrale. I più antichi testi in turco sono scritti con un alfabeto detto "runico", ma ben presto se ne hanno molti redatti con altri alfabeti, di origine non turca (brahmi, indiano; sogdiano e manicaico, iranici; siriano, di origine vicino-orientale). Popoli o gruppi sociali di lingua turca, convertiti a una determinata religione (manicheismo, cristianesimo, buddhismo), tendevano ad adottare l'alfabeto che la caratterizzava. Questa tendenza si manifesta in piena evidenza con l'arrivo e l'espansione dell'Islam: tutte le lingue turche, dall'Anatolia alla Cina, adottano allora l'alfabeto arabo.

A partire dal XIV secolo, le popolazioni turche dell'Asia centrale condivisero un'unica lingua scritta, detta "Chagatay", scritta con un alfabeto arabo parzialmente adattato alla fonetica turca. Solo negli anni '20 del XX secolo, quando l'Unione Sovietica ebbe suddiviso in varie repubbliche indipendenti il vasto territorio che era stato il Turkestan russo, le lingue turche delle nuove repubbliche assunsero una definizione etnica e nazionale. Nel Turkestan cinese (Xinjiang) nel 1935, con categorie affini a quelle sovietiche, si determinarono ufficialmente gruppi etnici, tra cui uiguri, kazaki, kirghisi, uzbeki, tatar, popolazioni di lingua turca. Si pose quindi il problema di scegliere un alfabeto per le loro lingue. Questo cammino si svolge parallelamente in Unione Sovietica e in Cina, e appare contraddittorio: si inizia in Unione Sovietica con la decisione di adottare un alfabeto latino modificato per tutte le lingue turche d'Asia Centrale, per passare all'adozione di alfabeti cirillici modificati diversi per ciascuna lingua. Anche in Cina tra il 1956-1957 si propone di adottare un alfabeto a base cirillica. Prevalse poi, tra il 1960 e il 1983, la latinizzazione della scrittura.

In Cina nel 1984 si torna all'alfabeto arabo, ma in forme differenti per uiguri, kazaki, kirghisi ecc. Questo ha reso più complicata la comunicazione tra popolazioni di lingua affine e ha contribuito a sviluppare tensioni nazionalistiche. Dopo la dissoluzione dell'Unione Sovietica, i vari stati indipendenti seguono ciascuno la propria via: in Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan e Uzbekistan si impiega un alfabeto latino adattato, in Kazakistan e Kirghyzstan ancora quelli cirillici. Nel XX secolo in Asia Centrale dalla lingua turca lette-

raria comune (*Chagatay*) si è dunque passati a circa 30 differenti lingue letterarie, con un parallelo processo di creazione di nazionalità in cui anche la scelta della scrittura ha avuto, ed ha, un ruolo.



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This chapter regards the relationship between language, alphabet, and nationality. The subject obviously is vast and in order to treat it thoroughly I would need a great deal of time, and above all, competences that I do not possess. Hence I will limit myself to presenting two cases, one rather ancient and the other more recent, which can

serve as examples and can stimulate reflections having to do with other chronological periods and geographical areas.

The starting point is to establish that there is no obligatory relationship between language and writing: per se, every language can be represented with any graphic system, even systems originally created for other languages – if necessary with certain adaptations ¹.

This means that the decision to adopt a certain kind of script depends to a large degree on other considerations, not having to do with the language itself, and that the choices of script made by different peoples and nations are an interesting clue to cultural, political and religious aspects of their history.

The first case that we will take into consideration is that of the Hebrews from "Biblical times" (circa 8th - 1st century b.C.) to "post-Biblical times" (from the 1st century b.C. to the Middle Ages).

The linguistic history of the Hebrew people is very complex: as early as the 5th century b.C. the Hebrew language had been replaced by Aramaic as the language spoken by Jews, taking on the functions of the language of the literary and religious culture. Indeed, the rabbis of the first centuries of our era called Hebrew *leshon ha-qodesh*, that is "sacred language": a definition that immediately emphasizes that it is not used in everyday communication, but rather is restricted to the liturgy – reading the Holy Scriptures in the synagogue – and to the study of the religious tradition.

The literary and epigraphic documentation shows us that from the late Biblical period on, that is from the 3rd century b.C., the languages used by Jews in the Near East were Aramaic, Greek and Hebrew: how well they were known and how and when they were used varied according to the environment (daily life, family surroundings, economic dealings, religious cult and so forth) and on the social and cultural level: there were literary persons able to read Greek lyric poetry and to

compose poetic works in Hebrew inspired by them (such as the author of the “Song of Songs”), that is a category of intellectuals endowed with elaborate linguistic competences. On another level, a minimal – superficial but efficacious – knowledge of Greek must have been widespread among the classes of those who were not cultured but rather engaged in commercial and economic activities². That people in general did not understand Hebrew is demonstrated by the fact that it was necessary, in the liturgy in the synagogue, to translate immediately into Aramaic the passage of the Bible that was read in Hebrew, so that those present could understand the meaning.

The willingness of the Jewish people to use “other” languages instead of their own was confirmed in later times, when, after the first rebellion against Roman rule (which ended with the destruction of the temple of Jerusalem in 70 b.C) and a second equally disastrous revolt (135 a.D.), the Jews dispersed in all the Near East, and then in Europe. Of course, there had already been Jewish communities outside the lands of Israel for many centuries: in Egypt, in Arabia and, above all, in Mesopotamia. Over time, these communities adopted the language of the place where they were living, not only in their everyday life, but also as a language of culture: the case of Arabic in the Near East, but in Spain too, is perhaps the best known, because numerous Jewish grammarians, philosophers, scientists and theologians wrote in this language³. But the same thing happened in the case of Persian in the East, and for the Romance languages in Europe. For this reason we speak of “Judaeo-languages”: Judaeo-Arabic, Judaeo-Persian, Judaeo-Italian and Judaeo-Spanish. The encounter with the Germanic languages led to the adoption of a High German dialect which produced Yiddish, the language of the Jewish communities of Eastern and Northern Europe.

In the context of such an evident permeability and willingness, both for everyday purposes and for literary purposes, to use different languages, how did the question of the use of alphabet appear?

The most ancient Hebrew inscriptions (9th-8th centuries b.C.) adopt an alphabet substantially similar to the “Phoenician” alphabets of the Near East. However, in parallel to the adoption of the Aramaic language, the Jews also adopted its alphabet. The present Hebrew script, in reality, is nothing but the last phase in the development of an Aramaic alphabet. It is called “square script”, because each character – they are only consonants – tends to occupy a square space. This development began, it is presumed, in the 4th century b.C. and was concluded around the 7th century a.D. The Middle Ages is the period in which the appearance of the Hebrew characters is defined, those characters which are still used in Israel and wherever Hebrew is written⁴.

OLD HEBREW

Hebrew	Phoenician	Aramaic	Hebrew	Phoenician	Aramaic
א	𐤀	𐤁	א	𐤀	𐤁
ב	𐤁	𐤂	ב	𐤁	𐤂
ג	𐤂	𐤃	ג	𐤂	𐤃
ד	𐤃	𐤄	ד	𐤃	𐤄
ה	𐤄	𐤅	ה	𐤄	𐤅
ו	𐤅	𐤆	ו	𐤅	𐤆
ז	𐤆	𐤇	ז	𐤆	𐤇
ח	𐤇	𐤈	ח	𐤇	𐤈
ט	𐤈	𐤉	ט	𐤈	𐤉
י	𐤉	𐤊	י	𐤉	𐤊
כ	𐤊	𐤋	כ	𐤊	𐤋
ל	𐤋	𐤌	ל	𐤋	𐤌
מ	𐤌	𐤍	מ	𐤌	𐤍
נ	𐤍	𐤎	נ	𐤍	𐤎
ס	𐤎	𐤏	ס	𐤎	𐤏
ע	𐤏	𐤐	ע	𐤏	𐤐
פ	𐤐	𐤑	פ	𐤐	𐤑
צ	𐤑	𐤒	צ	𐤑	𐤒
ק	𐤒	𐤓	ק	𐤒	𐤓
ר	𐤓	𐤔	ר	𐤓	𐤔
ש	𐤔	𐤕	ש	𐤔	𐤕
ת	𐤕	𐤖	ת	𐤕	𐤖

Fig. 1 The Hebrew “square” alphabet compared with the old Hebrew alphabet.

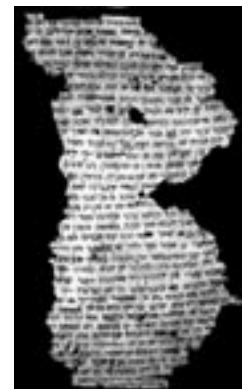


Fig. 2 Judaean-Persian fragmentary text from Central Asia (9th century?).

The “square” alphabet derived from the Aramaic alphabet hence became the one used generally, and it is interesting to note in what cases the ancient Hebrew alphabet was used. These are very rare cases: the first is documented by some Biblical fragments found in Qumran (from 1948 on). In these the name of God, that is the four letters YHWH, are written with the ancient Hebrew alphabet.

The reason for the variation of the script certainly derives from the necessity of marking the divine name with evidence in the text, insofar as – according to the restrictive interpretation of the commandment “Thou shalt not name my name in vain” the ancient Hebrews did not use to pronounce the name aloud when reading, but substituted it with other terms (especially “Lord”, and then also “Name”, “Place”, “Eternal”). The reason for which the ancient alphabet is used is religious: in a certain sense it is a “codification” for the name of God.

The religious matrix is at the base of the choice made by the Samaritans, a Jewish religious group detached from the main stream of the Judaism at an uncertain date (between the 5th and the 3rd centuries b.C.): for sacred texts they still use the ancient Hebrew alphabet, and not the “square” alphabet of Aramaic origin ⁵.

During the second revolt against the Romans, in 135 a.D., the Jewish rebels minted coins with the inscriptions in the ancient alphabet: in this case the choice appears to be motivated by political considerations, and gives clear testimony to the nationalist soul of the revolt.

In the post-Biblical period, as we have said, the Jewish communities scattered around the world adopted the languages of the places where they lived, while Hebrew maintained its function as a liturgical language and as the language of high culture ⁶. However Arabic, Spanish, Italian and so forth, that is the adopted languages, are almost always written by Jews with the square Jewish alphabet, with the appropriate modifications in order to represent vowels and phonemes which do not exist in Hebrew.

As a matter of fact, scholars question whether it is really possible to speak of “Judaeo-languages”, that is of languages that can be distinguished from the forms used by non-Jews by their linguistic characteristics (morphology, syntax), or whether the only distinctive aspect is the Hebrew script, and naturally the lexicon, enriched by terms which are specific to Jewish culture. For example,



Fig. 3 Judaeo-Arabic text (12th century: *Incipit* of a treatise by Galen translated into Arabic).

can we consider the Arabic written by Maimonides (Cordova 1138 - Cairo 1204), which we call Judaeo-Arabic because the author is a Jew and because the manuscripts of his works are written in the Hebrew alphabet, a different language respect to that written by contemporary Muslim or Christian Arab writers? Obviously we will not attempt to answer this question here, leaving that task to the specialists.

This phenomenon, that is the use of the Hebrew alphabet for the languages spoken and written by Jews in the Diaspora, lasts in time until the most recent case, that of Yiddish, it too normally written in Hebrew characters.

The sense of belonging to a religious and ethnic group, in the case of the Jewish people from Antiquity to the Middle Ages, seems to be expressed much more through choosing to use their own alphabet rather than in being attached to their own language. This perhaps can be explained by the fact that the Hebrew language continued to be used prevalently in the liturgical and religious sphere and that since it was defined as a “sacred language” it was not considered appropriate for “profane”, that is non-religious purposes⁷.

The use of the alphabet as an “ethnic-religious marker” among the Jews has a good parallel in the Near East: the Christians of present day Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria, whose language was an Aramaic dialect called Syriac, after the Muslim conquest (from the 7th century a.D. on) started to write in Arabic, but very often using the Syriac alphabet. That system lasted until the 19th century.

The second case I would like to present takes us from the Middle East to Central Asia, and regards Turkic languages.

The oldest Turkic texts date back to the 8th-9th centuries being found in memorial inscriptions on stone discovered in what is now Mongolia. They are written in an alphabet that is called “runic” because it looks very similar to the runic alphabet of ancient Germanic languages⁸. This “runic” alphabet may be regarded as being the original alphabet of Turkic languages in Central Asia. It also represents vowels and enables one of their typical characteristic phonetics, the so-called “vowel harmony”, to be reproduced in writing.

However not so very long ago there were Turkic texts written in other alphabets⁹, almost all of which originated in non-Turkic countries (*brahmi*, Indian; Sogdian and Manichaean, Iranian; Syriac, with Middle-Eastern origins) with the exception of the one called the Uighur alphabet because produced by the Turkic population of the Uighurs.

The Sogdian, Manichaean and Uighur alphabets share the same origins, having indeed derived from Aramaic alphabets (of Near Eastern origins) that are very similar to the Syriac one. While the definition of “Sogdian” is a geographical and ethnic one, since it denotes the language and the alphabet of the Iranian inhabitants of Sogdiana, the definition of “Manichaean” refers to the type of writ

RÖNIK TÜRK ALFABESİ

ORIGINE S. C.	ORIGINE S. C.	ORIGINE S. C.	ORIGINE S. C.
Α	Α	Α	Α
Β	Β	Β	Β
Γ	Γ	Γ	Γ
Δ	Δ	Δ	Δ
Ε	Ε	Ε	Ε
Ζ	Ζ	Ζ	Ζ
Η	Η	Η	Η
Θ	Θ	Θ	Θ
Ι	Ι	Ι	Ι
Κ	Κ	Κ	Κ
Λ	Λ	Λ	Λ
Μ	Μ	Μ	Μ
Ν	Ν	Ν	Ν
Ξ	Ξ	Ξ	Ξ
Ο	Ο	Ο	Ο
Π	Π	Π	Π
Ρ	Ρ	Ρ	Ρ
Σ	Σ	Σ	Σ
Τ	Τ	Τ	Τ
Υ	Υ	Υ	Υ
Φ	Φ	Φ	Φ
Χ	Χ	Χ	Χ
Ψ	Ψ	Ψ	Ψ
Ω	Ω	Ω	Ω

Fig. 4 “Runic” alphabet of the oldest Turkic inscriptions.



Fig. 5 “Chagatay” text in Arabic alphabet (XIX century).

texts written with this alphabet. These works go back to the preaching of Mani (216-277) and to the religion he founded, Manichaeism. There is therefore a relation between the script and the religious content of texts using the Manichaean alphabet. There again, there is also a religious link to be found in the case of the Syriac alphabet, it in fact being a question of the language and scripts typical of Christians in the Middle East and Central Asia.

An indication of the complex religious history of the Turkic population in Asia is that in Central Asia during the Middle Ages various alphabets were adopted for the Turkic languages and these alphabets were linked to a particular religious tradition (Buddhism with its relation to Indian texts can be added to the Manichaean religion and Christianity). It is apparent that when they were converted to a particular religion Turkic speaking peoples or social groups tended to adopt the alphabet that was typical of that religion not only for their theological, exegetic and liturgical texts but also for their literary ones.

As is common knowledge, the Turkic Medieval world's overall tendency to adopt the alphabet of the religious culture to which it belonged later developed – with the arrival and the expansion of Islam – in all the Turkic languages from Anatolia to China from that time forward adopting the Arabic alphabet.

To hold that the religious aspect was really the only one considered in establishing the choice of an alphabet would probably be incorrect. The tremendous importance of cultural prestige and social structure, in short of civilisation, that are communicated through a given language and a given script should also be remembered.

From a practical viewpoint almost all the “foreign” scripts adopted by the Turks, from Sogdian to Arabic, are characterised by being alphabets of languages that are phonetically different from Turkish and in particular are exclusively consonantal. However, problems arose in their use, and while it was possible to adapt certain characters with a few modifications to represent Turkic phonemes, the difficulty of representing the vowels was not resolved until much more recently in the 20th century. As shall be seen, drastic measures were taken by passing to alphabets that write vowels (Latin, Cyrillic), or less drastically by inserting characters with unambiguous vowel symbols into Arabic scripts¹⁰.

In the Middle Ages therefore, the Turks of Central Asia knew two distinct alphabets, the “runic”



Fig. 6 Population groups in Russian Turkistan / Central Asiatic Soviet Republics / CSI Central Asiatic Independent Republics.

alphabet and the Uighur one, but they also used other scripts up until the time when the Arabic alphabet became dominant ¹¹.

For several centuries the Central Asian Turkic peoples shared common written language, the so-called “Chagatay” ¹² which began to develop around the 14th century. The most famous literary work written in Chagatay is perhaps the autobiography of Babur (1483-1530), the conqueror of India.

The Turkic languages of Central Asia acquired their status of independent written languages after the Soviet Union had carried out along ethnic lines the division of what had previously been Russian Turkistan into a number of Union Republics, Autonomous Republics and Regions during the 1920s.

In “Chinese Turkistan”, the westernmost region ruled by China under the name of “Xinjiang”, the categories for the division of the peoples living in Russian Central Asia were adopted by the governor in 1935.

Principal ethnic groups officially recognized were: Uighur, Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Uzbek, Tatar, Han

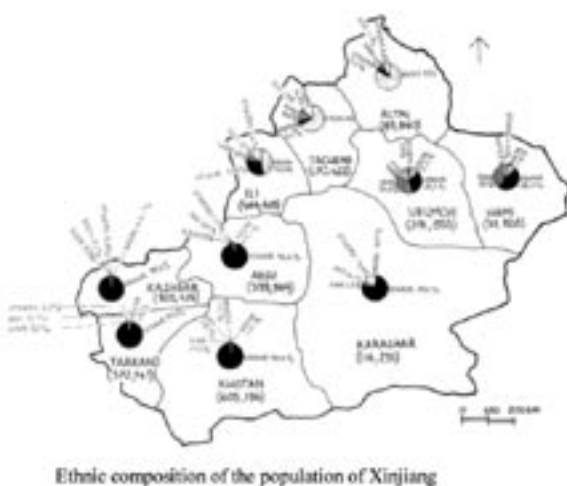


Fig. 7 Ethnic composition of the population in Xinjiang (PRC).

(Chinese), Hui-Dungan (Chinese Moslems), Manchu, Daur, Mongol, Xibo, Tajik, Russian, Taranchi. The first five are Turkic-speaking peoples.

At the same time as different nationalities were being recognised within the Turkic peoples the attempt was also being made to find more suitable writing systems than the Arabic alphabet for their languages.

In the Soviet Union the Latin alphabet was first officially introduced in Soviet Azerbaijan in 1925¹³, and a “Unified Turkic Latin Alphabet” for all the Turkic languages of Soviet Central Asia followed between 1927 and 1930.

But in the second half of the 1930s the policy was changed, and a campaign began to introduce, in place of the unified Latin alphabet, several Cyrillic alphabets somewhat different for each Turkic language. For instance, the Cyrillic alphabet for the Uighur language consisted of 41 letters – the Latin one being of 32.

The first change in China took place in 1937. It was indeed a minor one, but not insignificant. The government of Xinjiang was at that moment following a political course strongly influenced by the developments in the Soviet Union, and the Uighur intellectuals, although retaining the Arabic letters, agreed upon changes that brought their *order* and *number* in line with those of the Latin alphabet used for the Uighur language in Soviet Union.

During the years immediately following the establishment of the People’s Republic of China, three sets of changes were introduced into the writing of the Turkic languages, under the general principle established by the declaration according to which “all minority nationalities shall have freedom to develop their languages and writing, to preserve or reform their traditional customs and religious beliefs”¹⁴.

In fact, each change had been strongly influenced by Soviet national minority policy.

A	B	C	D	E	F	G
a	b	c	d	e	f	g
H	I	J	K	L	M	N
h	i	j	k	l	m	n
O	P	Q	R	S	T	U
o	p	q	r	s	t	u
V	W	X	Y	Z	Ol	Hı
v	w	x	y	z	ol	hı
K	Ə	Ө	Û	Ê		
k	ə	ө	ü	ê		

Fig. 8 The Latin alphabet used in the Soviet Union during the 1920s.



Fig. 14 Contemporary press in Uighur: English handbook.



Fig. 15 Contemporary press in Uighur: political propaganda: “Man zhongguoluq” [I am a Chinese].

And so, to this day, Turkic speaking peoples living in the People’s Republic of China write their language with modified Arabic alphabets.

The situation is different for the Turkic-speaking peoples of the Soviet Union. The use of various modified Cyrillic alphabets, in this case too with variations for the Azeri, Kazakh, Turkmen, Kyrgyz languages etc., was the norm at the time of the break-up of the Union. Nowadays the various independent states each go their separate ways: in Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan a modified Latin alphabet is used, while in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan the Cyrillic ones are still used. Obviously to some extent these choices reflect the political relationships that exist, or are desired, with Russia and Turkey.

The 20th century is one in which national languages have rapidly developed and increased in number. If we speak about European national languages, they have increased nearly threefold (from 16 to 50) in something more than 100 years. In Central Asia, if only the Turkic language writing systems are taken into consideration, the unified literary language (Chagatay Turkic) developed into 30 different literary languages.

NOTES

- ¹ So much so, that as is well known, the Chinese language can be transcribed in Latin characters, although for Chinese themselves it is more difficult to read, with respect to their traditional characters.
- ² The situation may be compared to that of the present day, with the widespread use of English at different levels.
- ³ Often, or better usually, these apparently diversified activities were carried out by single individuals: cultivated people in the Middle Ages, both in the Western and in the Eastern world, were characterised by a multiplicity of interests and competences.

- ⁴ Alongside the classical form naturally there were kinds of cursive script already in the Middle Ages, and today different fonts, more or less decorative, are used, according to the typographic requirements.
- ⁵ This may mean that the separation took place *before* the alphabet deriving from Aramaic came into use, or else that the Samaritans wanted to distinguish themselves by choosing an “archaic” alphabet.
- ⁶ In other words, the Jews of the Diaspora that had not expressly studied the “sacred language” did not understand it.
- ⁷ In the Middle Ages there were some non-religious literary works written in Hebrew and translations into Hebrew of works originally written by Jewish authors in Arabic, produced shortly after the appearance of the original. However the discussion on the legitimacy of using Hebrew as a spoken language is still open, although in a very marginal way: even after it was adopted by the State of Israel in 1948, there are groups of ultra-Orthodox Jews that prefer Yiddish, and believe that Hebrew must not be used for “profane” purposes.
- ⁸ Obviously between the two there is no relationship, neither historical nor phonetic. The resemblance is due to the type of support on which the script was originally used, that is stone and wood.
- ⁹ The majority of the written documents come from Turkistan, the vast region of Central Asia inhabited prevalently by Turkic populations which were never politically united except at the time of the Mongol Empire. More recently it was divided between the Russian – later Soviet – rule and Chinese rule, and today it is represented politically by several independent states – Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan – and by the Autonomous Region of Xinjiang-Uighur, part of the People’s Republic of China. The principal discoveries go back to the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries. They are due to the adventurous work of various explorers and scholars – Russian, German, English, French, Japanese. For these aspects, see the work by P. Hopkirk given in the bibliography.
- ¹⁰ In effect, in the use of the Arabic alphabet for Turkic languages, the vowels either are not indicated, or they are indicated in a very ambiguous way, to such a point that the same sign could represent four different vowels (e.g., the consonant *w* can have the value of *u, ü, o, ö*). This ambiguity can be overcome only by those who have an excellent knowledge of the language. Furthermore, certain consonants too are ambiguous in Arabic script: *k* can stand for *k*, but also for *g*.
- ¹¹ This does not mean that the other alphabets have been completely forgotten. The Syriac alphabet continued to be used sometimes until recently 19th century, by Christian communities of Turkic language living in eastern Anatolia; the same is true of the Greek alphabet, used by Turkic speaking Christians of the Greek-Orthodox tradition living in Anatolia. The Uighur alphabet did not disappear in Turco-Muslim literature and in chanceries; and it can be found in Ottoman manuscripts. It still survives today in Mongolia, where since 1992 it has been reintroduced as the official alphabet for the national language, after a long phase in which Cyrillic was used. The reason for adopting the Uighur alphabet goes back to the times of Gengis Khan (1206-1227) who, since the Mongols were illiterate, had recourse to Uighur scribes for the administration of the empire and to write down the Mongolian language. Mongolian is in fact a language related to the Turkic languages. A modified form of the Mongol Uighur alphabet is that used for the language of Manchuria, and it is still used today in the People’s Republic of China.
- ¹² The name derives from that of Gengis Khan’s son, who received the territory of Turkistan at the death of his father.
- ¹³ Three years later, in 1928, another important Turkic-speaking community, Turkey, introduced the Latin alphabet instead of the Arabic one.
- ¹⁴ *Common Program of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference* (September 1949), Article 53.



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