

True to his Word: Bekir Çobanzade's Approach to Language in Crimean and Azerbaijani Periodicals

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Abstract

In the first decades of Soviet rule, periodicals were an important means of formulating and communicating ideas about language. Linguists, apparatchiks, poets, politicians, religious leaders, and others used magazines to create new images of linguistic community. They also sought to convince their readers of orthographic, grammatical, lexical, and stylistic changes in the name of Soviet nationhood. Among them, the Crimean Tatar intellectual Bekir Çobanzade occupies a unique position as an author who migrated between physical and linguistic locations, writing fiction and non-fiction for Crimean and Azerbaijan periodicals in different languages and on divergent topics. In this presentation, I will explore Çobanzade's shift from idealist notions of language families towards Marxist-Leninist dogma, and his eclectic use of language varieties to target different audiences and topics. In doing so, I will investigate how the periodical press mirrored debates and discussions in more traditional scholarly circles and acted as a mechanism of mass transmission for ideas and decisions about language. And, in focusing on Bekir Çobanzade's vast collection of publications, I will show how one man's production can be taken as an example of the flexibility of linguistic, ethnic, and ideological identity that was abruptly snuffed out in the Great Terror.

Biography

Dr. Michael Erdman is the Curator of Turkish and Turkic Collections at the British Library. He was awarded the title of PhD by SOAS in 2018 for his dissertation *Divergent paths: a comparative analysis of Soviet and Turkish historical narratives of Central Asia, 1923-1937*. Most recently, his publications have focused on periodical production in Soviet Turkic communities in the 1920s and 30s. He is currently working on a monograph about periodicals by exiled Turkic intellectual in Europe and Japan in the 1930s. Prior to returning to academia in 2013, Michael worked for the Canadian Foreign Service in the Middle East, Europe, and Latin America.