Journal of American Studies of Turkey
9(1999):101-102.

Book Review

Kızılderililer ve Türkler (Native Americans and Turks), by Reha Oğuz Türkkan. 1999, 208 pages. Available from E Yayınları, Klod Farer Caddesi, İletişim Han No.7 Kat 2, 34400 Cağaloğlu, İstanbul, Turkey.

Aslı Geçim and Jamil Khader

With the globalization of literary and cultural studies today, many scholars as well as literary institutions and organizations have become increasingly interested in international scholarship on American culture and literature. Indeed, recent conferences on the transnational context of US literature featured panels not only on the world in the US but also on the US, or America, in the world. The book under review here partakes in these recent efforts, by remapping transnational links between the civilizations of the Turks and Native Americans. Reha Oğuz Türkkan's *Kızılderililer ve Türkler* (Native Americans and Turks) discusses the significance of the "immigration of Turks and proto-Turks" in the establishment of Native American societies. His main argument is that there are many similarities between Native American civilizations and that of the Turks that can be observed in their cultures. Türkkan writes that he is "not searching for evidence of race unity of the Turks and the Native Americans; . . . [but] for evidence of the role of the immigration of the Turks and proto-Turks in the creation and evolution of Native American civilizations" (back cover, translation by reviewers).

The book is divided into three parts, supplemented by a selection of the author's own previously published writings on the genocide of Native Americans. In the first part, Türkkan discusses the different "types" of Native Americans. According to him, there are two types: first, Native Americans with red skin, straight black hair, and dark-colored eyes, the familiar type; and secondly, Native Americans with white skin and brown hair, generally wearing long beards, physically resembling Turks.

In the second part, Türkkan takes up the origins of the two societies. He advances that it is the Turks living originally in Central Asia from time immemorial (Note 1) who crossed the Bering Straits, traveling from Siberia to Alaska, and established the populations that "whites" encountered in the New World. This is the "Bering Straits theory," as it is called. Türkkan maintains that although there are no documents concerning the arrival of "Turks" to America, there are traces that

demonstrate that they did, in fact, reach and settle in America “many many years ago,” as he puts it.

In the third part of the book, the author examines the similarities between Turks and Native Americans. He attempts to illustrate how these two societies share uncanny similarities in their languages, customs, religions, arts, etc. For instance, Türkkan argues, there are similarities between the Quechua language of the Native Americans and the Tchuvash dialect/language of the Turks (one of the oldest forms of the language[s] of the Turks, presently spoken in the autonomous republic of Tchuvashstan in the Russian Federation). Türkkan writes that the word for *less* is the same in both languages: as in Quechua and az in Tchuvash (as it is in present-day standard Turkish of the Republic of Turkey); winter is *kasha* in Quechua and *kış* in Tchuvash (as again it is in present-day standard Turkish of the Republic of Turkey); stop is *tchur* in Quechua and *dur* in Tchuvash (as again it is in present-day standard Turkish of the Republic of Turkey).

He also compares calendars. Turks of Central Asia (who were basically Shamans before they espoused Islam from the ninth century A.D. onwards) used a calendar with twelve animals (animal names designated months and days) that looks very much like Aztec calendars. In the calendars of both societies, there are twenty days in a month, and eighteen months in a year. Türkkan furthermore maintains that the political structures and religions are exactly the same. For example, the Kök Turks (552-745 A.D.) divided their country into four parts**,** referring to these parts by different colors. The Aztecs, Türkkan asserts, used the same system in the pre-contact era. Besides, the Aztecs, like the Shaman Turks, turned toward the rising sun to pray. He adds that the digit 9 was the holy number for both Turks and Mayas. As for art, the author maintains that the geometrical design on a bowl in Peru is nothing but a reflection of the art of the Huns (who are Turks also having issued from Central Asia).

Kızılderililer ve Türkler makes an intriguing read in the context of the globalization of literary and cultural studies in the US. Despite its lapses into the rhetoric of essentialisms, pure identities, and primordial pasts, the book can open up a space to question dominant theorizations of Native American identities, the discourse of indigeneity, and the truly transnational foundations of the US.

Notes

IThat Turks living originally in Central Asia from time immemorial migrated to Anatolia to establish the Seljukid state, the Ottoman Empire and the Republic of Turkey respectively is a known fact. For Türkkan, their migration to what is now called America was one that was prior to the one to Anatolia.