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**Nikolaj Aleksandrovič Baskakov**  
**(22.03.1905–26.08.1996)**

**Gunnar Jarring**

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When in 1964 I took up my post as Sweden's ambassador to the Soviet Union, I looked forward to meeting Soviet scholars of Turcology. I knew them by name and reputation and had corresponded with some of them, but I also knew how delicate their position was with regard to personal contacts with foreigners. This was at the height of the Cold War and the ensuing political suspicion against all foreigners. Among them, ambassadors were considered to be a more exquisite and often

malevolent variety, although less so in my case, as I was from a small, neutral country. So I bided my time.

But one day I was asked to pay a visit to the Chief of Protocol of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He told me that the Soviet Turcologists residing in Moscow wanted to invite me to a colloquium on such and such a date. Would I accept?

This was the beginning, with official blessing, of my acquaintance with Nikolaj Aleksandrovič Baskakov. It resulted in a personal friendship which continued after I left Moscow in 1973 and lasted as long as he lived. By and by my meetings with the Soviet Turcologists became more frequent. I responded by inviting them to my embassy for a luncheon or dinner. It was always Baskakov who was the leader of the group that came. The others represented different Turkic peoples and were all active researchers in their respective fields. For me, these meetings were precious moments which highlighted my otherwise quite dull diplomatic life.

Nikolaj Aleksandrovič Baskakov was an outstanding Turcologist with a deep knowledge of all the Turkic peoples and tribes of the Soviet Union. The list of his innumerable published works brings to light a gold mine of linguistic erudition ranging from Karakalpak to Altay Turkic, including profound investigations into philological problems within the Turkic world. In addition, Baskakov had wide interests outside his appointed academic field. He was a collector of everything relating to the life of the unhappy Russian emperor Paul I. He loved classical music, including church music. It should not be forgotten that he was a composer in his own right. He composed a hymn dedicated to the PIAC meeting in Oslo in 1989. All his leisure time was spent in Zvenigorod, a place that was like music to him.

A great Turcologist has left us, a man of much wisdom and a true humanist.

## **In memory of Nikolaj Aleksandrovič Baskakov**

**Dmitrij M. Nasilov**

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On the 23rd and 24th of March, 1995 a conference celebrating the 90th birthday of Professor Nikolaj Aleksandrovič Baskakov, doctor of philology and pre-eminent Russian Turcologist, was held at the Institute of Linguistics of the Russian Academy of Sciences in Moscow. At this conference, numerous followers and colleagues delivered reports on various Turcological subjects, dedicating their presentations to the hero of the day. The conference materials were published in 1997 in a special proceedings volume (Tenišev 1997). Unfortunately, Baskakov only saw the first proofs of the book to be published in his honour. He died in late August 1996 after a brief illness.

Seventy years of this scholar's life were devoted to the world of Turcology he loved so well. Baskakov was a remarkably versatile Turcologist who fulfilled his creative potential up to the last day of his life and to whom no aspect of this composite science was alien. More generally, he was a richly talented person with a keen poetic and musical intuition. Baskakov's academic legacy is strikingly vast: The last list of his publications contains 639 titles (Tenišev 1997: 33-42) including dozens of monographs. Baskakov's scientific contributions and pedagogical activities—he trained a large number of graduate and doctoral students from practically every Turkic-speaking republic—have left an indelible mark in Turcology.

His scientific career began when he was a student taking part in expeditions (1926-1927) to the Kazakh, Karakalpak, Kirghiz and Uzbek republics to collect linguistic and ethnographic material for the Depart-

ment of History and Ethnography at Moscow University, from where he graduated in 1929 after having received a universal Turcological education.

Ethno-linguistic expeditions conducted by the university turned out to be the very foundation upon which the richest field research of many Turkic dialects developed. After graduating from the university, Baskakov worked for various educational institutes and research organisations, regularly embarking on expeditions and business trips in order to collect linguistic, folkloric and ethnographic material. He also provided scientific advice to some Turkic-speaking republics, such as the Kazakh, Karakalpak, Khorezm, Kirghiz and Altay republics, and to areas with Noghay settlers. Every such trip enriched the young Turcologist, and the unique ethno-linguistic material he gathered never remained in his archives for very long, but was continuously evaluated and became Turcology's permanent property.

Baskakov first visited Oyrotiya (now the Altay Republic) in 1934 in connection with the issues of language development and the organisation of a national school system there. The related linguistic and didactic problems are reflected in his works (Baskakov 1935, 1940a). From that time on, Baskakov never really interrupted his Altay language studies. During the Second World War, he returned to the Altay where he had the opportunity to study the Altay Turkic dialects more closely and to classify them. The major result of this work is a series entitled "The northern dialects of the Altay (Oyrot) language" (Baskakov 1958b, 1965-1966, 1975, 1985a). His works also treated many aspects of the toponymy, onomastics, folklore and ethnography of the Altay people. He participated in the compiling and publishing of Altay dictionaries (Baskakov & Toščakova 1947; Baskakov 1964). In 1991 he wrote the national anthem of the Altay Republic (Baskakov 1997b); his last publication devoted to an Altay Turkic subject is Baskakov (1994).

Baskakov's Noghay expedition resulted in essays on the Noghay dialects, including text material and dictionary (Baskakov 1940b), another dictionary (1963) and a language grammar (1997a).

The achievements in Turkic lexicography are closely linked with the name of Nikolaj A. Baskakov. Beginning with the first Uyghur-Russian dictionary (Baskakov & Nasilov 1939), he took part in compiling and editing a number of Turkic language-Russian dictionaries (Karakalpak—1958a, Turkmen—1968, Noghay—1963, Khakas—1953, Gagauz—1973, Karaim—1974).

The 1930s, when Baskakov's scientific career was just budding, were characterised by the intensive language policy of the Soviet state. Its most important activities then included the development of alphabets for languages previously not written, the transcription of texts from the Arabic alphabet into first the Latin and then the Cyrillic script; the establishment of literary languages and language norms; the creation of national schools teaching indigenous languages; the elaboration of language didactics; the development of textbooks and dictionaries; and, finally, the scientific description of languages and dialects. Together with other Turcologists of our country, Baskakov played an active role in all of these measures, fruitfully co-operating with young people from the various national groups. More than once, he returned to one of the cardinal questions, namely how to improve the national alphabets and orthographies (Baskakov 1982).

Baskakov made an exclusive contribution to the study of the grammatical structure of Karakalpak. Having begun with a brief grammar (Baskakov 1931, 1933), he later composed a major work (Baskakov 1951-1952) on the language, containing a comprehensive description of its morphological categories and illustrated with rich material taken from folklore as well as colloquial and literary speech. In addition, the grammar was described by means of a system which applied to Turkic language structure in general. This work exercised an appreciable influence, particularly in the Turkic-speaking republics, evident from the fact that Baskakov often edited or advised on subsequent Turkic grammars.

For many years Baskakov was engaged in creating an integrated system of description for the Turkic languages. He became interested in problems concerning the parts of speech, word formation, lexical morphology, verbal nouns, moods and conjugation, word origin, Turkic phonology, the syntax of word combinations and extended sentence structure, and so on. The scientist often expressed his own, original point of view on most of the questions occupying Turcologists. That appears to be the reason for the friendly characterisation of Baskakov's view as "baskakčilik", coined by the witty Nikolaj K. Dmitriev. Meanwhile, Russian Turcology received, if not the only one, certainly an extraordinary and remarkably comprehensive description of the structure of the Turkic languages, including their phonological, morphological and syntactic systems (Baskakov 1975, 1979a, 1988a). Further developing this body of historical and typological findings, whose significance has yet to be fully grasped, remains the task of future scholars.

Baskakov's theoretical milestone is the acknowledgement of the organic isomorphism of all language levels, with syntax occupying the superordinate level. It was he who defined the general structure of the Turkic languages and described their morphologies, which, in turn, served as the basis for their phonological description (Baskakov, 1988a: 8). Within this conceptual framework, the scientist also rehabilitated the formation history of the Turkic linguistic type, i.e. the developmental course of these languages: From isolation to agglutination by means of analytic mechanisms (morpheme order in word formation is defined in terms of attributive relations). Baskakov's theory of Turkic language structure was polished through his disputes with Nikolaj K. Dmitriev, Ėrvand V. Sevortjan, Boris A. Serebrennikov, Gennadij P. Mel'nikov and other language theorists, but its undoubted advantage over the other Altaists' constructions lies in the aforementioned integrative principle, according to which every phonological regularity and grammatical category is grounded within the linguistic system. Such a composite approach reflects ideas of Gustav Ramstedt, Heinrich Winkler, Władysław Kotwicz, Jean Deny, and Kaare Grønbech. However, aside from Winkler, who proposed a theory of the Altaic linguistic type and history at the beginning of the century, Baskakov was the first Russian Turcologist to develop his own Altaistic theory. Baskakov's type of general understanding of the Turkic languages is seconded in the works of only a few other scientists, such as Boris A. Serebrennikov, Gennadij P. Mel'nikov and Aleksandr M. Ščerbak. Baskakov shared certain views regarding the genetic relationship of the Altaic languages (Baskakov 1981), which helped him construct his theoretical framework. It is thanks to his efforts and support that the works of Ramstedt, Kotwicz and Räsänen appeared in Russian—works that played an important part in the development of Altaistic studies in our country.

Baskakov dealt not only with the synchronic and diachronic typology of the Turkic languages, he also participated in the development of their historical grammar; in addition to works published earlier, he authored a number of sections in the substantial historical grammar composed under the direction of Ėdhem R. Tenišev at the Institute of Linguistics of the Russian Academy of Sciences (Baskakov 1984b, 1988b).

Baskakov was a graduate and later curator of the Moscow Turcological school—which traditionally dealt with the wide range of "Turco-Slavic" problems—and many of his works are dedicated to this subject,

with Baskakov (1979b [1993], 1985b) being particularly distinguished. His numerous published works on Turkic ethnography, toponymy and onomastics are related to this theme. His most interesting later ethnographic work is a description of the traditional Turkic theatre (Baskakov 1984a), which draws on materials gathered during his expeditions in the 1930s.

Two more of Baskakov's works became part of the fundamental stock of Russian Turcology. The first is a classification of Turkic languages in which linguistic criteria are correlated with the history of Turkic ethnos formation and differentiation originating from an epoch of Hiung-nu tribal alliance (Baskakov 1952). It should be noted that this classification has not only come to occupy a permanent place in all Turcological textbooks, but is also applied in the majority of Russian reference works (encyclopaedias, dictionary-reference books, ethnographic studies, etc.) when the Turkic languages and their dialects are characterised.

The second of Baskakov's major contributions to the field is his textbook on general Turcology, which to this day has no worthy substitute. It has gone through three publications (Baskakov 1960, 1962 [1969]) and educated more than one generation of Turcologists, both in Russia and the Turkic-speaking republics.

During his many years of activity, Baskakov came into contact with countless scholars involved in different fields of study of the Turkic peoples. These personalities, who together form a picture of the modern world of Turcology, constitute a special chapter in the scientist's legacy.

Nikolaj Baskakov, with his noble character and scientific disinterestedness, was also the model Russian intellectual. The most senior member of staff of the Institute of Linguistics (since 1937), he never held high-level posts, instead devoting all his energy to science. He was always smart, calm and even-tempered; he had an excellent command of the Russian language, was a lover of nature, florist and meloman. As an aficionado of Russian history, Baskakov was particularly fond of the era of Paul I and collected rarities from that time. Finally, Nikolaj Baskakov was a devoted husband and father. He is remembered by his friends and colleagues for all of this and more.

The scope and significance of Baskakov's contribution to Turcology can be compared to the output of a large team of researchers with different specialities, ranging from the musical critic to the historiographer. His activities earned him the title of "honoured man of science" in the



Russian Federation, Kazakhstan, Karakalpak and Turkmenistan; he is also a honoured member of a number of foreign Oriental societies (Great Britain, Germany, Finland, Hungary, Poland, Turkey) and laureate of the PIAC prize. Baskakov participated in numerous linguistic and oriental congresses and symposiums where he delivered interesting and original reports.

The works of this prominent scientist will continue to attract the attention of Turcologists and Altaists, of typologists and of representatives from many other branches of the humanities.

Nikolaj Baskakov described his road through life in his autobiography (Baskakov 1995).

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