



TURKMEN CULTURAL ORIENTATION

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Turkmenistan Cultural Orientation

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Chapter 1: Profile

Introduction

Although sparsely populated with approximately 5 million inhabitants, Turkmenistan was the 4th largest territorial state to be established after the demise of the Soviet Union (U.S.S.R.) in 1991.¹ Independence presented the people of Turkmenistan with the opportunity to reassess their own past. This occurred under the repressive political regime of the late President Saparmurat Niyazov who styled himself “Turkmenbashi” (Father of the Turkmen People). He penned an official historical narrative, *Ruhnama*, which is treated with the same reverence as the Quran. Its accuracy is widely in doubt, but the purpose of giving it wide societal exposure was to create a homogenous ethnic Turkmen identity which, in turn, would legitimate the government through the promotion of nationalism.

Area

Turkmenistan is primarily low lying, averaging elevations between 100 m (328 ft) and 200 m (654 ft) above sea level. Turkmenistan’s topography is dominated by the Turan Depression, which dips 100 m (328 ft) below sea level in places, and constitutes about 80% of the land mass. The Karakum Desert occupies over 350,000 sq km (135,135 sq mi). In contrast to the Sahara, the Karakum supports shrub and bush vegetation in a landscape dominated by shifting sand mountains that can reach heights of 20 m (65 ft). Oases make infrequent appearances and marshy salt flats dot the arid environment. In the northeast, a second desert named the Sundukly, is an extension of the Kyzylkum Desert from neighboring Uzbekistan.



Central Asia’s Pamir-Alay mountain chain, where the peaks reach elevations of up to 3,000 m (9,842 ft), extends into the far eastern part of the country. The Kopetday Mountain range nestled along Turkmenistan’s border with Iran is characterized by dry and sandy slopes, plateaus and sharply descending ravines.²

Climate

The climate of Turkmenistan has been characterized as subtropical desert. Average annual precipitation is approximately 191 mm (19 cm), though the range of rainfall within the country is substantial. The northeast typically receives less than 80 mm (8 cm) while the Kopetday Mountains in the southwest can receive as much as 300 mm (30 cm) annually. Precipitation occurs mainly from October through April, and there is very little rainfall during the summer season. In January, the average temperature is about -4°C (24 °F) in most of the country, except in the southwest where the climate is milder. There the

¹ Only Russia, Kazakhstan and Ukraine are territorially larger.

² Windows on Asia. “Geography of Turkmenistan.” No date.
<http://asia.msu.edu/centralasia/Turkmenistan/geography.html>

average temperature is 4°C (39°F) during the coldest month. July is the hottest month; average temperatures can exceed 30°C (86°F) throughout the country.³

Bodies of Water

Amu Darya River

The Amu Darya is the longest river in Central Asia and primary source of water for Turkmenistan. The number of users, particularly those growing cotton, has led to an excessive number of dams resulting in a declining water volume and a higher saline content. This heavy use in turn has had adverse effects on the Aral Sea, located on the border of Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, into which it ultimately empties.



© Louis Heeger
Amu Darya River

Tejen River

Known as the Hari Rud in Afghanistan where it originates, the Tejen follows a 1,130 km (700 mi) course and marks the border between Turkmenistan and Iran before flowing into the steppes south of the Karakum desert.⁴ Fed by mountain snow melt water, the primary flow is between March and May. During the summer months, the river bed is usually dry.

Murgab River

The headwaters of the Murgab River are in the western Hindu Kush. From its origin it flows west and then north through Afghanistan before crossing the Turkmenistani border, where it ultimately is absorbed into the sands of the Karakum Desert.⁵

Atrek

The Atrek River, which flows into the Caspian Sea only during the spring season, is 635 km (394 mi) in length, of which 500 km (310 mi) lies inside Iran.⁶

Karakum Canal

The Karakum is the largest irrigation canal in the world and reflects an achievement of Soviet-era engineering.⁷ Construction started in 1954, and by 1962 it had reached Ashgabat. The main section runs from the Amu Darya to Gokdepe, west of Ashgabat, rimming the Karakum desert. An extension, completed in the early 1980s, carries the

³ UN FAO, Aquastat. "Turkmenistan." 1997.

<http://www.fao.org/nr/water/aquastat/countries/turkmenistan/index.stm>

⁴ Environment News Service. "Asian Development Bank Prepares Afghanistan for New Dam." 5 November 2004. <http://www.ens-newswire.com/ens/nov2004/2004-11-05-02.asp>

⁵ UN FAO Corporate Document Repository. Petr, T. "Coldwater Fish and Fisheries in Afghanistan." 1999. <http://www.fao.org/docrep/003/x2614e/x2614e08.htm>

⁶ EuroCaspian. Kalantari, Farhad. "Azerbaijan: The Land of Eternal Fire." 2006. http://www.euro-caspian.com/gulfs_and_rivers.htm

⁷ Different figures have been given for the total length of the canal by reputable sources. Some discrepancy may be explained by the extension which was completed in the 1980s as well as additional planned extensions which have yet to materialize.

water further to Turkmenbashi, on the Caspian coast, making the total length 1,400 km (870 mi).⁸ The water is used to irrigate over 1 million ha of cropland (2.47 million acres) which produces about half of Turkmenistan's cotton output and almost all of its grain.

Caspian Sea

After the USSR was disbanded, an equitable division of the Caspian Sea's resources proved difficult to achieve among the five littoral state governments.⁹ Russia, backed by both Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan, has pushed for each surrounding state to receive 20%. Iran has held out for a division based on national coastline, which is more favorable to Tehran. Turkmenistan has wavered between the two positions.¹⁰ The hydrocarbon reserves located beneath it may be substantial.

Other pressing concerns are environmental and consider the body of water as a whole from its basin to surface water, tributaries and related ground water. Five governments have their sights set on maximizing national advantage, fearing any concession will benefit a rival government.¹¹

Flora and Fauna

Turkmenistan claims over 450 types of plants.¹² However, this flora and fauna must be able to survive in the country's arid environment. Among wildlife, two distinct hooved mammals, protected in the country's nature reserves, stand out. They are the goitered gazelle (*jieran*), which has an enlarged larynx, and the Central Asian wild ass (*kulan*), which roams in large herds. In addition there are several species of wild cats, including the shy sand cat.



The desert is home to large rodent populations, which survive by spending most of the time underground. The holes made by burrowing rodents are evident on many sandy desert slopes. These furry creatures provide sustenance for birds of prey like hawks and falcons.

⁸ Encyclopedia Britannica Online. "Karakum Canal." No date. <http://www.britannica.com/eb/topic-312090/article-9044692>

⁹ New York Times, World Briefing. "Asia: Turkmenistan: Caspian Meeting Fails." 25 April 2002. <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9904EFDF153EF936A15757C0A9649C8B63>

¹⁰ Jamestown Foundation. Daly, John. "Turkmenistan Pushes for New Offshore Oil Development." 17 May 2004. http://www.jamestown.org/edm/article.php?article_id=236715

¹¹ *Environmental Law in Developing Countries*, Selected Issues Volume II. Zhandayeva, Dana. "Framework Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the Caspian Sea: Perspectives of Environmental Protection." October 2004. http://books.google.com/books?id=Adbn_5jGSHQC&pg=PA141&lpg=PA141&dq=caspian+sea+tragedy+of+the+commons&source=web&ots=JMaTg0s6V1&sig=9nAgUEr-FY16PUe8SpTzKfFyvCA

¹² Harvard University, National Resource Center Russian, Eastern European and Central Asian Studies. "Red Deserts." No date. <http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~nrc/lendinglibrary/geographicregion.html>

Turkmenistan also has a number of reptiles including several species of poisonous snakes such as the Central Asian cobra. Among lizards, the desert monitor (*zemzen*) is unusually large, with a length up to 1.8 m (5.9 ft) and a weight of 2.5 kg (5.5 lbs). It can deliver a painful blow with its tail. Roaming Turkmen nomads appreciated its presence, however, because it kept down the poisonous snake population. The main threats to the desert ecosystem are irrigated cotton cultivation and hunting and poaching of endangered species.¹³

Major Cities

Ashgabat

Ashgabat is the capital of Turkmenistan. It is of relatively recent origin, expanded from a village (*aul*) by Russian colonists. A severe earthquake in 1948 left the city in ruins. It was rebuilt in a dreary, utilitarian style of architecture characteristic of the U.S.S.R. After independence in 1991, Ashgabat received a face lift paid for out of the proceeds from natural gas revenues. The government district streets are now lined with opulent new white marble structures and flowing fountains. In an arid environment, control of water is equated with power, such as that belonging to the late President Saparmurat Niyazov, who was responsible for the capital's makeover. He is represented by the Arch of Neutrality, a 75 m (246 ft) high monument which holds a revolving 12 m (39 ft) gold statue of him.



Turkmenbashy

Founded by the Russians as an administrative center, this city was built on the shores of the Caspian Sea and originally known as Krasnovodsk. It was developed as a transportation hub and as a shipment point for raw materials that were shipped back to Russia. After independence it was renamed Turkmenbashy in honor of the first President.

Dashoguz

Dashoguz is the only sizeable city in the northern part of the country. Its location, close to the border with Uzbekistan, explains its significant ethnic Uzbek population. Although it was an urban settlement dating back to the Khanate of Khiva, the Soviets made it a modern administrative center. After independence it assumed border functions which became more pressing given the likelihood that subsidized Turkmen goods would be smuggled into Uzbekistan.

Mary

Mary is Turkmenistan's most historic city. Referred to as Mouru in ancient Persian texts, it was a provincial capital of the Persian Achaemenid Empire. Alexander the Great took control in the 3rd century B.C.E. and renamed it Margiana. After the Arabs gained control of the area in the 7th century C.E. the city was rebuilt as the capital of Khorasan

¹³ World Wild Life. "Central Asian Southern Desert." 2001.
http://www.worldwildlife.org/wildworld/profiles/terrestrial/pa/pa1312_full.html

and served as a base for Muslim proselytization.¹⁴ In the 11th century the Seljuk Turks made it their capital. Under the Seljuks Merv, as they called it, became a repository of knowledge and learning replete with libraries and *madrassas*.¹⁵ Subsequently plundered by the army of Genghis Khan's son in 1221, residents were forced to flee.¹⁶ It did not reemerge as an urban center until the Russians annexed it in 1884. In 1937, its name was changed to Mary by the Soviet government.¹⁷

Early History

The territory of Turkmenistan was successively conquered by the armies of men who typically had the intent to expand into more prosperous areas. The Parthian Empire is considered to be one of the most powerful and influential civilizations of the ancient world. Its capital, Nisa, which was located near present-day Ashgabat, dates back to the 3rd century B.C.E.¹⁸ By the 4th century B.C.E., Alexander the Great had conquered the area en route to India.

Arab traders expanded commerce into Central Asia in the 7th century C.E. By the 8th century, the Arab caliphate was in control of the area between the Aral Sea and the Caspian Sea. This introduced Islam to the inhabitants who were assimilated into trade and cultural networks based in Arab lands. Over time Arab, but not Islamic, influence waned. The Oghuz Turks, the forebears of ethnic Turkmen, had begun to migrate into western Central Asia, northern Persia and present-day Turkey. They established tribal confederations as well as the Seljuk Empire in the 11th century. The area encompassing present-day Turkmenistan, or parts of it, subsequently came under the control of Genghis Khan and the Uzbekistan-born Tamerlane. For several centuries, competing Central Asian tribes exerted nothing more than nominal control over the area. By the 18th century, the Persians had established authority over the southern half of present-day Turkmenistan while the Khanate of Khiva controlled the northern half.



In the 19th century, Imperial Russia developed an interest in Central Asia, and specifically Turkmenistan. Simply put, Czarist Russia needed to control Transcaspia in order to improve their supply routes to territories acquired further east. During the Russo-Persian War of 1803–1814, the Russians concluded an alliance with several Turkmen tribes against Persia. Despite this alliance, Turkmenistan itself remained outside Russia's

¹⁴ Encyclopedia Britannica. "Merv, or Margu, or Mouro (ancient city of Turkmenistan)." No date. <http://www.britannica.com/eb/topic-376494/Merv>

¹⁵ Suite101. "Silk Road Cities: Merv." 26 August 2007. http://middleeasttravel.suite101.com/article.cfm/silk_road_cities_ancient_merv

¹⁶ *Genghis Khan Conqueror of the World*. De Hartog, Leo. "The Hurricane From the East [p. 111]." 1999. Barnes and Noble Publisher.

<http://books.google.com/books?id=HbcA19Yh0U4C&pg=PA111&lpg=PA111&dq=genghis+khan's+son+merv&source=web&ots=oTURHHcTVE&sig=IIuaN5bEh9403Xjj6ZTJK0igxxQ>

¹⁷ Bernard Cloutier. "Turkmenistan." 1997. <http://berclo.net/page97/97en-turkmenistan.html>

¹⁸ Radio Free Europe. Pannier, Bruce. "Turkmenistan: Ancient City Nisa Added To UN's Cultural Heritage List." 6 July 2007. <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2007/07/5af417ef-fd03-4591-8747-6ecca4f2a58b.html>

control, something which Moscow was keen to remedy since the area was the one outstanding piece of Central Asia not under Russian control. While the western region was easy to conquer through a combination of negotiation and force, inhabitants of the eastern part put up fierce resistance and the Russians only prevailed at the Battle of Gok-Depe in 1881.¹⁹ For the next century, the fate of Turkmenistan was bound up first with that of the Russian Czarist government and later the Soviet socialist state.

Czarist colonial rule

Colonial rule was aimed at harnessing the region's resources for Russian development. Construction of the Transcaspian Railroad facilitated this objective. Cotton cultivation, a priority of Moscow since the American civil war had interfered with the international cotton trade, registered a fifteen-fold leap in yields between 1890 and 1915. Livestock herds also expanded and petroleum extraction efforts were initiated. Most of the proceeds were not reinvested in Turkmenistan, however, engendering the animosity of the Turkmen in rural areas as well as Slavic settlers who had established a presence in the cities.

Russia's entry into World War I created more dissatisfaction among the colonized population who faced the prospect of conscription. The Bolshevik overthrow of the Czarist government led to a power vacuum in Central Asia. While the Bolshevik communist ideology found favor with the Slavs who had taken up residence in the cities, it had little resonance with rural Turkmen farmers and animal herders. Other forces competed for their loyalty and the Soviet government did not bring Turkmenistan fully under its control until 1924 when the Turkmenistan Soviet Socialist Republic was formally established.²⁰

The Soviet Era

The Soviets, operating on the assumption that land ownership was the basis for socio-economic division, implemented a land-reform program in 1926. Collectivization was expected to usher in egalitarian social change; it was believed that commune life would create a classless workers' society. For nomadic herders, however, land ownership meant little. For settled farmers, the problem was not a shortage of land, but the limited supply of water for subsistence farming. Allocation of finite resources was generally handled within the tribal descent group.²¹



Nonetheless, by 1929 15% of the farmers, or *daykan*, had had their land holdings collectivized. A decade later, 99% of landholdings had been consolidated

¹⁹ Encyclopedia Britannica. "Battle of Gok-Tepe or Battle of Gokdepe (Turkmen History)." 2008. <http://www.britannica.com/eb/topic-237210/Battle-of-Gok-Tepe>

²⁰ Department of Justice, Immigration and Naturalization Service, Alert Series. "Turkmenistan: Political Conditions in the Post-Soviet Era [p.4]." February 1993. <http://www.uscis.gov/files/nativedocuments/turkme94.pdf>

²¹ *Tribal Nation: The Making of Soviet Turkmenistan*. Edgar, Adrienne. "A Nation Divided [p. 176]." 2004. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

into *kolkhoz* (collective farms) which proved to be a more efficient form of cash crop production.²² In 1937, the USSR under Stalin became a cotton exporter with Turkmenistan as a major supplier.²³ This was not accomplished without enormous social costs, however. An unknown number of farmers, perhaps as high as several hundred thousand, were killed during the collectivization process. Many were suspicious of Soviet motives and felt such a rearrangement violated Islamic norms of property relations. In addition the Stalinist political purges, which took place from the mid 1930s through the early 1950s, wiped out virtually the entire Muslim religious hierarchy.

Turkmenistan's economic development gained major forward momentum from World War II. After Germany's advance on the U.S.S.R., much of Soviet industry, which was concentrated in the eastern part of the country, was relocated to areas which remained outside the main battlefield, including Turkmenistan.²⁴ Some of these factories remained after the war and came to constitute Turkmenistan's heavy industrial base. The completion of the Karakum Canal gave the country a sophisticated irrigation system for cultivating crops, specifically produce and cotton, resulting in increased yields.²⁵

Independence

Turkmenistan declared its independence in two stages. The first was in August 1990 when its Soviet-created parliament declared Turkmenistan to be an autonomous republic within the USSR. Party leader Saparmurat Niyazov became president. In October 1991 Turkmenistan declared itself fully independent. The Democratic Party replaced the Communist Party as the sole legal political party. Two parliamentary bodies which are controlled by the president complete the political system. The 2,500-member People's Council is the supreme legislative body and outflanks the 50-member *mejlis* (parliament) in authority. Elections to these bodies, in which candidates are nominated by the party, elicit little interest on the part of the citizenry since the platforms of candidates are indistinguishable.²⁶



In essence, the Soviet system of governance made the transition largely intact except that nationalism replaced communism as the source of legitimacy for state rule. Niyazov created a “cult of personality” government, renaming himself Turkmenbashi, or Father of

²² Department of Justice, Immigration and Naturalization Service, Alert Series. “Turkmenistan: Political Conditions in the Post-Soviet Era [p.5].” February 1993. <http://www.uscis.gov/files/natedocuments/turkme94.pdf>

²³ American University, Inventory of Conflict and Environment Case Studies. Calder, Joshua and Jim Lee. “Aral Sea and Defense Issues.” No 69. 1995. <http://www.american.edu/iced/aralsea.htm>

²⁴ *Historical Dictionary of Turkmenistan*. Abazov, Rafis. “Introduction [p. xxvi.]” 2005. Scarecrow Press. http://books.google.com/books?id=Q3KTqLaFkO8C&pg=PR76&lpg=PR76&dq=world+war+ii+russian+i+industry+relocated+turkmenistan&source=web&ots=IUOIPOSU_D&sig=TOIgz1kVwneLi_njpizgt-VYMDI

²⁵ Immigration and Naturalization Service. Department of Justice. Alert Series. “Turkmenistan: Political Conditions in the Post-Soviet Era [p.4].” February 1993. <http://www.uscis.gov/files/natedocuments/turkme94.pdf>

²⁶ Radio Free Europe. Saidazimova, Gulnoza. “Turkmenistan: Observers Say Upcoming Elections ‘Are Elections In Name Only’.” 16 December 2004. <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2004/12/5c4c6fc0-e19c-48ff-a7ad-6de2eb02853e.html>

the Turkmen. Portraits of him appeared everywhere along with statues.²⁷ The Soviet educational curriculum was replaced by *Ruhnama*, a grand historical narrative/fairy tale of Turkmen history he penned himself. It became part of daily life, appearing on tests for a driver's license and as a reference for those who worked in government offices.

Niyazov's unexpected death in December 2006 led to uncertainty over the political future of the country in which his pronouncements bordered on the bizarre.²⁸ The extent to which his successor, Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov, is dedicated to maintaining this type of leadership is the subject of intense speculation. In June 2007, he was photographed kissing a copy of *Ruhnama*.²⁹ His portrait is beginning to replace that of Turkmenbashi in public places. Yet a dramatic increase in various types of interaction with the outside world during 2007 indicates Berdimuhamedov intends to lead the country in a new, though unlikely, democratic direction.³⁰

Media

There is no freedom of the press in Turkmenistan. Governmental authorities monitor media outlets, run printing presses and set down editorial policies. Turkmenistan has three radio and four television stations: Miras (Heritage), Yashlyk (Youth), Altyn Asyr (Golden Century) and Turkmenistan. The majority of the urban population, however, opts to watch mainly Russian and Turkish programming available through inexpensive satellite dishes that are installed on the roof of almost every household. In early 2008, President Berdimuhamedov publicly chastised the media for not reporting on new developments in society.³¹ Given the possible consequences for taking too much initiative, the Turkmenistani media are highly averse to risk and will lag in reporting on new trends and developments.



Economy

The mainstay of the economy is natural gas, which is sold primarily to the Russian state-controlled firm Gazprom. This makes Turkmenistan a rentier state or one which does not

²⁷ University of Wollongong. Brown, Stephen and Konstantin Sheiko. "The Soviet Legacy and Leader Cults in Post-Communist Central Asia: The Example of Turkmenistan" (presented to the 16th Biennial Conference of the Asian Studies Association of Australia in Wollongong 26–29 June 2006.) June 2006. <http://coombs.anu.edu.au/SpecialProj/ASAA/biennial-conference/2006/Brown-S+Sheiko-K-ASAA2006.pdf>

²⁸ Washington Post. Lipman, Masha. "After a Tyrant, What's Next?" 22 December 2006.

<http://www.carnegieendowment.org/publications/index.cfm?fa=view&id=18929&prog=zru>

²⁹ DailyFreeman.com. Associated Press. Harvey, Benjamin. "Mandatory Reading." 7 June 2007.

http://www.dailyfreeman.com/site/news.cfm?newsid=18432492&BRD=1769&PAG=461&dept_id=81975&rfi=6

³⁰ San Francisco Chronicle. Kucera, Joshua. "New Turkmen President Tones Down Despotism." 28 August 2007. <http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?file=/chronicle/archive/2007/08/28/MNPNR5FMB.DTL&type=politics>

³¹ Central Asia Caucasus Institute. Johns Hopkins University. Durdiyeva, Chemen. "Berdimukhammedov Slams Mass Media in Turkmenistan." 23 January 2008.

<http://www.cacianalyst.org/?q=node/4780>

draw its income from taxation, but instead receives them in the form of rents or payments on oil or mineral reserves from international buyers.³² Essentially the government functions as a distributor of favors. The cultivation of good relations with state employees is important for those who seek government jobs, as well as for those private business owners that want to import consumer goods. Free water, gas and electricity are also provided by the government and constitute a type of “social contract” intended to deter political opposition. Yet delivery of those services is erratic.³³

Cotton is another commodity which is sold internationally. While land ownership has been privatized, the government has maintained control of cultivation, harvesting, and sales rather than privatizing the agricultural sector. This has left farmers with little income from cotton. Indeed, the low value of the *manat* resulted in little monetary gain from the ten-fold increase in the state purchase price in 2007.³⁴ Forced labor, including that of children, is common during the harvesting season.³⁵

Ethnic Groups

Ethnic Turkmen are descendants of the Oghuz tribe. They are subdivided into tribes in which two of the largest are further subdivided into regional branches which have little in common. One of these is the Teke, which claims the largest number of members. The Akhal Teke inhabit the Akhal region. This populous southern region of the country includes Ashgabat, the capital. The Mary Teke, traditional rivals of the Akhal, occupy the Mary region which borders on both Iran and Afghanistan. The Yomut are similarly divided; the Western Yomut inhabit the Balkan region, bordering the Caspian Sea and Iran. By contrast, the northern Yomut predominate in the Dashoguz region bordering Uzbekistan.³⁶

Descendants of the Oghuz only comprise between 70–80% of the total Turkmenistani population, however. Other peoples of Turkic origin claim different ancestries. Non-Turkmen ethnicities include Uzbeks whose communities are close to the border with Uzbekistan. Their children can attend schools in which the Uzbek language is the medium of instruction ensuring the perpetuation of their culture and separate identity.

Kazakhs primarily inhabit areas in northern Turkmenistan close to the Caspian Sea. In addition, Russians live in the cities and Tajik refugees fleeing civil war in their own



Courtesy of Chahana.com
Tribal elder at Ashgabat market

³²Alternatives, Journal of International Studies, Vol. 1, No. 1. Kuru, Ahmet. “The Rentier State Model and Central Asian Studies: The Turkmen Case.” Spr. 2002.

<http://www.alternativesjournal.net/volume1/number1/akuru.htm>

³³ Radio Free Europe. Pannier, Bruce. “Turkmenistan: ‘Gas Rich’ Shiver in the Cold.” 3 January 2008.

<http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2008/01/a2e230b8-4619-4245-ac1d-3bfd86683bbf.html>

³⁴ Institute for War and Peace Reporting. “Farmers Still Exploited Despite Higher Pay.” 27 August 2007.

http://iwpr.net/index.php?apc_state=hen&s=o&o=l=EN&p=btm&s=b&o=338128

³⁵ The Financial Times. Peel, Quentin. “Central Asia is Corrupted by Cotton.” 10 March 2005.

<http://yaleglobal.yale.edu/display.article?id=5399>

³⁶ Global Security. “Population.” c.2000–2008.

<http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/centralasia/turkmen-pop.htm>

country have been given permanent residence in Turkmenistan. In the case of the latter two, it is more difficult to maintain their separate cultural identity; this has caused an unknown number of Russians to return to Russia.

Chapter 2: Religion

Pre-Islamic Religion

Journals of Arab explorers in the 8th and 9th centuries note that the people of Turkmenistan were worshipers of lunar divinities. In fact, long before monotheistic Islam became the religion of the land, inhabitants of the area were practicing shamanism.³⁷ Around 300 B.C.E., Persian Parthian invaders brought Zoroastrianism.³⁸ Artifacts such as excavated Chinese coins and rock carvings show that the ancient city of Merv (present day Mary) in southern Turkmenistan had become a center of West Asian Buddhist activity by the 3rd century C.E.³⁹ Elements of early faiths such as ancestor worship and attachment to talismans and amulets later made their way into local Islamic tradition.



© Fraser Lewy
Landscape near Merv

Sunni Islam

The early Arab explorers who visited Central Asia in 7th and 8th centuries were not conquerors. Islam in Turkmenistan was not well established until the 10th century. In spite of Shi'a Persia next door, the only form of Islam to take hold in Central Asia was Sunni Islam. Sunni Muslims believe in being guided by the Quran, the *sunna* or practices of the prophets, and they are urged to select their prayer leaders, imams, from the most upright and pious Muslims. Shi'a Muslims on the other hand believe in leadership through lineage and descent from the Prophet Muhammad's son-in-law, Ali.

In Turkmenistan, Sunni Islam has incorporated elements of ancestor and saint worship as well as Sufi⁴⁰ practices. Normally forbidden in Sunni Islam, shrine pilgrimages to the graves of venerated ancestors and saint-like figures called *gombashy*⁴¹ are very common in rural areas throughout the country. Pilgrims can be seen offering votive prayers surrounding the shrines, often in the presence of children or infirm relatives in need of cures or fertility. The *gombashy* were usually members of non-Turkmen groups or *vlat* (*övlät*)⁴² that are said to have descended directly from Sunni Arab caliphs close to the prophet Muhammed. Present-day members of *vlat* are still esteemed among rural

³⁷ Shamanism is the belief that a priest, or shaman, can mediate between the physical and spiritual worlds and bring about cures and transformations.

³⁸ Zoroastrianism was an ancient faith practiced in parts of western Asia. Its leader, Zoroaster or Zarathustra, taught the eternal struggle between forces Ahura Mazda, the shining Lord Wisdom, and Ahriman, the evil Prince of Destruction.

³⁹ Transoxiana Journal Libre de Estudios Orientales. Compareti, Dr. Matteo. "Buddhist Activity in Pre-Islamic Persia According to Literary Sources and Archaeology." August 2007.
http://www.transoxiana.org/12/compareti-iranian_buddhism.php

⁴⁰ Sufi – a doctrine of Islamic mysticism that seeks communication with God through meditation and dance, e.g., whirling dervishes.

⁴¹ *Gombashy* means "head of the cemetery."

⁴² *Övlät* from the Turkmen word meaning "holy."

Turkmen and their members are frequently invited to lend blessings to a communal celebration.⁴³

Religion and Government

Although the constitution of Turkmenistan identifies the country as a secular state, President Niyazov during his long tenure tended to define the national heritage of the country as Islamic. His successor, Berdimuhammedov, has not altered this stance and he, too, continues to refer to religious freedoms gained following independence. To support his claim of religious freedom, the President can point to the construction of 398 mosques since 1991, all built with government subsidy. Nonetheless, the fear of radical or political Islam has driven the government to establish the Council of Religious Affairs, which reports directly to the President. All Islamic seminaries or *madrassas* must be registered and their clerics licensed by the government. In a show of governmental control of religious bodies, institutions such as the Theological Faculty of Ashgabat have been downgraded and the number of their faculty members and students has been reduced.⁴⁴ To demonstrate national compliance with international Islamic practice, the government routinely sanctions one plane, containing 188 pilgrims, to attend the annual *hajj* pilgrimage to Mecca in spite of the quota of 4,500 set by authorities in Saudi Arabia.⁴⁵



© Michel Roland-Guill
Ashgabat celebration

The first non-Islamic faith to be recognized was Turkmenistan's largest minority religion, Russian Orthodox Christianity. Other smaller minorities have had considerable difficulty in attaining official recognition. This is because the Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations, last amended in 1996, requires all non-Islamic congregations to be officially registered. Registration requires a membership of 500 in any given subdistrict. Minorities other than the Russian Orthodox have had difficulty attaining congregation status. For this reason, followers of the Baha'i faith have been particularly affected, as have Jehovah's Witnesses and Georgian Armenian Christians. All had applied for recognition in the 1990s. In May 2005, they were registered with several other minority faiths. The small Jewish community opted for a different route. They never applied for official registry and their religious activities have never been questioned.⁴⁶

⁴³ University of Georgia. Central Asia Monitor. Tyson, David. "Shrine Pilgrimage in Turkmenistan as a Means to Understand Islam Among the Turkmen." 1997. <http://www.uga.edu/islam/turkmen.html>

⁴⁴ ReligiousTolerance.org. Forum 18 News Service. "Religious Intolerance in Turkmenistan. Part 1." 2005. http://www.religioustolerance.org/rt_turkm.htm

⁴⁵ Central Asia-Caucasus Institute. Boucek, Christopher. "Berdymukhammedov Burnishes Muslim Credentials on Visit to Saudi Arabia." 18 April 2007. <http://www.cacianalyst.org/?q=node/4594>

⁴⁶ Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor. U.S. Department of State. "Turkmenistan. International Religious Freedom Report." 2007. <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2007/90236.htm>

Religion in Daily Life

In the 70 years of Soviet rule, the focus of religious activity shifted from the mosque to the home. Turkmen traditionally have no strong tradition of mosque attendance, preferring instead to pray at home or at shrines. Although Islam is an integral part of their cultural heritage, not many are fully aware of the elements of their faith. Some are even nonbelievers who support religious revival only as a part of national revival. The impressive mosques that have been built since independence have come about through government endowments and not through the finances of local congregations.⁴⁷



Turkmen who do believe and practice their faith are obligated to the five pillars of Islam: declaration of faith (*shahada*), prayer five times daily (*salat*), charity (*zakat*), fasting during the month of Ramadan (*saum*), and pilgrimage to the holy city of Mecca (*hajj*).

They must accept Muhammad to be the last of the prophets which began with Adam and included Abraham, Moses and Jesus. Moreover, they must believe the Quran is the divine word of God as revealed to Muhammad by the angel, Gabriel. Muslims observe congregational prayers at noon on Friday and that day tends to be somewhat like a Sunday for Christians.⁴⁸

Interactions Between Males and Females

Whether personal faith is weak or strong, Islamic traditions still shape Turkmen social interaction and family life. In terms of male and female interactions this means a girl guards her virginity and remains with her family until she marries. There is no dating before marriage, and unmarried females avoid being seen in the company of males outside their families, lest their honor be questioned.⁴⁹

Religious Holidays

There are two religious holidays in the Islamic calendar: *Seker Bayramy* and *Kurban Bayramy* (also called *Gurbanlyk*). *Seker Bayramy* corresponds to *eid al-fitr* in the Arabic speaking Muslim world. This feast, three days in duration, marks the end of the fasting month of Ramadan. Muslims abstain from all drink and food as well as smoking and sexual contact from dawn to sunset during Ramadan. For the non-Muslim visitor this also means no smoking, drinking, or eating in public places during daylight hours. Most international hotels will provide travelers with meals and beverages which may be consumed at designated areas inside the hotel or in guest's rooms.

⁴⁷ Mongabay.com. Country Studies. "Turkmenistan.- Society." No date.
http://www.mongabay.com/reference/country_studies/turkmenistan/SOCIETY.html

⁴⁸ Florida State University. "Understanding Islam and the Muslims." No date.
<http://mailer.fsu.edu/~mkasapog/msa/islam.htm>

⁴⁹ *Tradition and Society in Turkmenistan: Gender, oral Culture, and Song*. Blackwell, Carole. "Religion and Belief Patterns [p.39]." 2001. Richmond, Surrey. RoutledgeCurzon

Muslims make up for the austerity of daylight hours by having late evening festivities and entertainment. To permit late night activities, the 11 pm evening curfew is suspended during the month of Ramadan. The *Seker Bayramy* is characterized by colorful festivities, kitchen specialties, music and dance.

Kurban Bayramy is known to Arabs as *Eid al-Adha*. This festival of sacrifice that coincides with the high holy days of the Month of Pilgrimages, *haji*, is more solemn. It commemorates Abraham's readiness to sacrifice his son, Isaac. Muslims view the sacrificed sheep of *Kurban Bayramy* as symbolic of the sheep that God substituted for the boy, Isaac.

14 Exchange 1: Will you be celebrating Gurbanlyk?

Soldier:	Will you be celebrating Gurbanlyk?	thiZ gurwanlik belleyangiZmi?
Local:	Yes!	howa!

Places of Worship

The list of great Turkmen mosques of the past and present is long. Among the monuments to the Islamic past are the 15th century mosque of Seyit Jemaletdin in Anau, and the Mausoleum of the 13th century mystic Najmeddin Kubra, which has become a destination for pilgrims and the holiest shrine in Kunya Urgench. Modernity has brought two famous mosques, both of which may be visited by non-Muslims. They are the Turkmenbashi Ruhy Mosque outside Ashgabat, built by President Niyazov to commemorate victims of the great 1948 earthquake, and the Geokdepe Saparmurat Haji Mosque west of Ashgabat.⁵⁰



© Fraser Lewy
Dome of the Mausoleum of Turabeg Khan

Many, but not all, places of worship in Turkmenistan may be visited. As a rule, Russian Orthodox churches may be visited by practicing Christians. Islamic shrines, often found inside cemeteries, are among places that would be off limits to non-Muslim travelers.

Exchange 2: May I enter the mosque?

Soldier:	May I enter the mosque?	manga metjide girmek mUmkinmi?
Local:	Yes.	howa

In any case, those wanting to visit a mosque should inquire in advance if and when it may be visited. A few rules of etiquette apply to visiting religious places like mosques. First, they should not be visited during prayer times. All visitors should be modestly dressed.

⁵⁰ Oriental Express Central Asia. "About Turkmenistan: Monumental Sites." No date. <http://turkmenistan.orexca.com/catalog/53/?p=2&page=0>

Exchange 3: Do I need to cover my head?

Soldier:	Do I need to cover my head?	men bashimi ErtmElimi?
Local:	Yes.	howa

For men this means clean, pressed trousers and long sleeve shirts; for women, long skirts and long sleeve blouses with a head cover or scarf. When entering a mosque the shoes, but not the socks, should be removed. Inside a mosque, visitors should not touch any ceremonial objects or copies of the Quran.

Exchange 4: Must I take off my shoes inside the mosque?

Soldier:	Must I take off my shoes inside the mosque?	men icherde kEwshUmi chikarmalimi?
Local:	Yes.	howa

There is no photography, loud talking, laughing, eating, or smoking in any place of worship. Finally, one should never walk in front of an individual who is praying since it invalidates his prayer.

Exchange 5: When do you pray?

Soldier:	When do you pray?	thiZ hachan namaZ okayarsingiZ?
Local:	We pray at noon.	biZ gUnortan namaZ okoyari

Chapter 3: Traditions

Greetings

The friendliness and hospitality of Turkmenistanis towards foreigners may at first be tempered by a concern that public interaction with foreigners might result in unwanted attention from local law enforcement agencies.



© Fraser Lewy
Shoppers at Tolkuchka Bazaar

Exchange 6: Good morning.

Soldier:	Good morning.	ertiringiZ hayirli bolthun
Local:	Good morning.	ertiringiZ hayirli bolthun

Government officials usually require permission from authorities before agreeing to meet with foreign nationals. Hesitant hospitality is especially true in official settings in Ashgabat.

Exchange 7: Good afternoon.

Soldier:	Good afternoon.	EylaningiZ hayirli bolthun
Local:	Good afternoon.	EylaningiZ hayirli bolthun

A Turkmenistani who at first avoids returning a smile is most often not being rude; just a little cautious. However, in most cases, especially outside the capital city, natural friendliness and a hearty handshake usually win out.

Exchange 8: Good evening!

Soldier:	Good evening!	gich yaghshi!
Local:	Good evening!	gich yaghshi!

Turkmenistan has been an isolated country for many years and consequently the people are endlessly curious about life in foreign countries. Once they are comfortable with a visitor, he can expect detailed questions about lifestyles elsewhere in the world.

Exchange 9: Good night!

Soldier:	Good night!	gijangiZ rahat bolthun!
Local:	Good night!	gijangiZ rahat bolthun!

Handshakes can break the ice or cement friendships for males. However, females seldom shake hands, least of all with foreigners. Men who know each other or share tribal ties may kiss each other on the cheek following the handshake. A visitor's greeting should also be accompanied by a sincere, "How do you do?" inquiring after the other person's well being.⁵¹

⁵¹Khiva Interactive Guidebook. "Greetings and Civilities." No date.
<http://www.khiva.info/gb/customs/greetings.htm>

Exchange 10: How are you?

Soldier:	How are you?	yaghdylaringiZ nahili?
Local:	Fine, very well.	gowi, gati gowi

A woman may politely acknowledge a social greeting from a male with a nod. She will on no occasion initiate a greeting and handshake with a male outside her family. Likewise, a male foreigner should not greet or make gestures to a Turkmenistani woman.

In the aftermath of the Soviet era, Turkmenistanis were quick to drop the use of *yoldash*, or comrade, when addressing each other, male or female. In its place, people have returned to the use of traditional forms that predate communism. In formal and official situations, it is customary to address a man as *Jenap*, meaning “mister,” plus the surname (e.g., *Jenap Rejepow* or Mr. Rejepow).

Exchange 11: Hi, Mr. Rejepow.

Soldier:	Hi, Mr. Rejepow.	thalam jenap rejepov
Local:	Hello!	thalam!
Soldier:	Are you doing well?	gowumi yaghdylaringiZ?
Local:	Yes.	howa

It is still acceptable to refer to a woman as *Khanym* or “madam” (e.g., *Khanym Rejepow* or Mrs. Rejepow). In less formal social settings, visitors will hear younger members of society referring to older and senior members as *yashuly*, meaning “respected one.” Occasionally elders will address younger or junior members as *jigi*, or in some dialects as *ini*.⁵²

**Hospitality and Gift Giving**

Once the social ice is broken and a foreigner is known to the local population, he will likely be invited to dinner, or possibly to a larger family festival such as a wedding. An invitation to a Turkmenistani house is not to be missed. If invited, one should arrive on time, greeting the family on arrival.

Exchange 12: How is your family?

Soldier:	How is your family?	mashgalangyZ gowumi?
Local:	They are doing fine, thank you.	olaram gowi, kEp thagh bolung

Likewise, one should take a small house gift. Flowers are always acceptable and flower sellers abound in every city and in larger towns. When taking flowers, one should ensure to bring an odd number, because even numbers are considered unlucky. Alcohol is not

⁵² *Historical Dictionary of Turkmenistan*. Abazov, Rafis. “The Dictionary.” 2005. Lanham: Scarecrow Press.
<http://books.google.com/books?id=Q3KTqLaFkO8C&printsec=frontcover&dq=turkmen+polite+address>

advisable, but gifts from a home country such as brand name cigarettes or chocolates are particularly welcome.

Exchange 13: This gift is for you.

Soldier:	This gift is for you.	bu thiZe thowghat
Local:	I cannot accept this.	men oni kawul edip biljek dal

Upon entering a house, one should remove one’s shoes, but not socks, at the door, taking care to point the shoes toward the interior of the house. This is also a local good luck superstition. In a rural area, a visitor may be invited to dine in or even spend a night in a traditional *yurt*. The *yurt* is a portable Turkmen nomad dwelling made from a round, wooden frame covered by white or black felt, white being reserved for newly married couples. Whether at home or in a *yurt*, furnishings are sparse and families eat and sleep on the floor, which is often covered with rich, red Turkmen carpets.⁵³

Eating Habits

At meal times, the carpets are covered with a large plastic mat. In some rural regions there is also a low circular wooden table or *desterkhan* around which cushions are arranged for guests to recline. Because clean hands are required for part of the meal and passing food by hand is good table etiquette, guests are usually given the opportunity to wash their hands either in a wash basin near the dining area or in rural settings at a tap outside in the courtyard. If food such as bread, meat, or fruit, is passed around the table during a meal, it is always with the right hand. The left hand is considered unclean and food passed with the left hand is considered defiled. When a meal is finished, guests are once again expected to wash their hands before coffee or tea is served.



Courtesy of Chahana.com
Sharing a meal in Mary

Turkmenistanis serve both unfermented green tea and black tea as after meal beverages; green being the preferred tea. A ceremony accompanies the serving of tea. The hot tea is poured three times from a fresh pot into a small porcelain cup and then returned to the pot; this to insure that it is thoroughly brewed. It is equally likely that a guest would be served vodka or beer in place of tea or coffee.

Exchange 14: I really appreciate your hospitality.

Soldier:	I really appreciate your hospitality.	thiZing mihmanthEyerlighingiZe Eran minetdar
Local:	It is nothing.	ol hich

Serving vodka or beer is a vestige of over 70 years of Soviet influence, which continues to override Muslim injunctions against alcohol. The practice of toasting with rounds of

⁵³ Stantours. Central Asia. “Turkmenistan: Darvaza Oasis.” 6 December 2001.
http://www.stantours.com/tm_rg_ahal_do.html

vodka is common and may be a challenge for a healthy western constitution. There is the risk of being pressured to drink far more than one wishes or can, indeed, hold.

Types of Food

Turkmen traditions of hospitality require a guest to be served more food than he can physically consume. An array of salads, fruits, breads, sausages, meat and chicken dishes, and sweets is usually spread out in front of guests.



© Fraser Lewky
Women preparing chorba

Exchange 15: This food is very good.

Soldier:	This food is very good.	bu nahar Eran gowi
Local:	It's palow.	bu palou

Frequently, the first course will be a *chorba* or rich meat and vegetable soup.⁵⁴ This may be substituted by a thick stew made from meat and onions called *dograma*.

Exchange 16: What ingredients are used to make *dograma*?

Soldier:	What ingredients are used to make <i>dograma</i> ?	doghramaning ichinde nameler bar?
Local:	Bread, meat, onion and soup.	chErEk, et, thoghan we chorba

The highlights of any meal are the main courses like *manty* (large ravioli-like dumplings stuffed with ground meat and onion), *shashlik* (grilled, spicy kebabs), or the Central Asian rice favorite, *plov* (*palow*).

Exchange 17: What is the name of this dish?

Soldier:	What is the name of this dish?	bu naharing adi name?
Local:	This is <i>manty</i> .	bu manti

Cörek (*chorek*) is a traditional flat, round bread. If served *cörek*, one should take care not to turn it face down, i.e., glazed surface down. This is said to bring bad luck to both host and guest. Several meat dishes, as well as the traditional *cörek*, are prepared in the conical clay oven called a *tamdyr*. The *tamdyr*, a cousin of the Indian tandoor oven, can be seen in the courtyard of Turkmenistani homes.⁵⁵

Exchange 18: The food tastes so good.

Soldier:	The food tastes so good.	naharing taghami Eran thUji
Local:	Thank you.	thagh bolung

⁵⁴ Khiva Interactive Guidebook. "Guests and Hospitality." No date. <http://www.khiva.info/gb/customs/guests.htm>

⁵⁵ Khiva Interactive Guidebook. "Turkmenistan: Bread." No date. <http://www.khiva.info/gb/food/non.htm>

Traditional Jobs and Economy

A recent study by the United Nations revealed that cultural norms in Turkmenistan, regarding employment appropriate for men or women, have not changed dramatically since independence. Women still identify nursing, education, art, and culture as jobs suitable for women if they choose to work outside the home. Women are very unlikely to pursue employment in areas regarded traditional for men: petroleum industry and energy production, transportation, and communications. There is a latent expectation that women will continue to opt for the role of homemaker and housekeeper, in lieu of work outside family roles.⁵⁶

Dress Code

Like other Central Asians, Turkmenistanis are conservative when it comes to dress. The wearing of shorts by men, other than at the beach or on the tennis court, is inappropriate. Other dress novelties such as cut-offs, T-shirts with logos, and brightly colored backpacks would make a visitor stand out as a culturally insensitive foreigner.



© Fraser Lewis
Locals and tourists in Ashgabat

Exchange 19: How should I dress?

Soldier:	How should I dress?	men name geymeli?
Local:	Wear loose fitting clothes which cover your body.	enamingiZi doli yapyan rahat eshik geying

Walking boots and training shoes are acceptable for a mountain trek or a round on the sport field, but not for a stroll around town. Women do not wear shorts and are well advised to wear long dresses or skirts with their arms covered.

Exchange 20: Is this acceptable to wear?

Soldier:	Is this acceptable to wear?	shu geyinshim bolyami?
Local:	Yes.	howa

Turkmenistanis wear clean, neatly pressed clothes. Even in dusty provincial areas they manage to stay well groomed and to keep their shoes shined.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ United Nations General Assembly. WOM/1558. “Committee on Elimination of Discrimination Against Women: 723rd & 724th Meetings.” 17 May 2006.

<http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2006/wom1558.doc.htm>

⁵⁷ *Lonely Planet Guide. Central Asia.* Mayhew, Bradley, Greg Bloom, John Noble, and Dean Starnes. “Turkmenistan [p. 405-420].” July 2007. Oakland, CA: Lonely Planet.

Social Events

Weddings

Two main events highlight the cycle of life that begins with birth. They are marriage and death. Marriage often begins with a young man's mother seeking a *kelin* or bride for her son. When a suitable virgin has been found and discreet inquiries made about her character and her family, a delegation from the groom's family makes a visit to the house of the *kelin*. Sweets are exchanged and, over tea, an offer of marriage is made on the groom's behalf. The *kelin* may decline. However, if she accepts, serious preparations begin. The *patir toy*, a ceremony at which both families share flaked bread, signals the first of the formalities that culminate weeks later in the actual marriage. The bride price or dowry which was agreed to in early negotiations is tendered to the bride's family by the groom's mother. The groom's mother also presents the *kelin* with a large bag of



© Fraser Leavy
Wedding in Ashgabat

groceries every Sunday for several weeks before the wedding ceremony. Other gifts like jewelry and bridal dresses are presented as well. Finally, on the eve before the wedding, females on both sides perform the *henna yoka*, decorating hands, feet and sometimes the face and ears with intricate designs in dark amber henna. At the groom's house, a rowdy bachelor party takes place the same evening with musicians and dancers.

Exchange 21: Congratulations on your wedding!

Soldier:	Congratulations on your wedding!	toyungiZ bilen gutlayarin!
Local:	We are honored you could attend.	thilap geleningiZ UchUn thagh bolung

On the morning of the wedding ceremony, the bride, groom, and important relatives visit the local registry office to record their marriage in an official registry book. Following this, the couple part and return to their individual houses. When they next meet a few hours later, it is at the groom's house where the *kelin salam* or greeting of the bride takes place.

Exchange 22: I wish you both happiness.

Soldier:	I wish you both happiness.	men thiZing ikingiZe baght arZu edyarin
Local:	We are honored.	thilaningiZ UchUn minetdar

The bride's parents do not attend the feast at the groom's house. Dressed in white with braided hair and covered with a white gauze veil, the bride bows to the groom and guests in a sign of submission to her marital duties. Feasting and celebration in the presence of the extended family, friends, and neighbors continues throughout the day and into the

evening. Late in the evening, the newly wedded couple retires to their room or to a bridal *yurt* erected for the occasion.⁵⁸

Funerals

The sound of wailing alerts the neighborhood to a death in the family. Because Islamic tradition requires a speedy burial, the same day or within 24 hours if possible, events proceed rather quickly. An undertaker of the same gender as the deceased is summoned and together with relatives of the deceased, the body is washed. The jaw is tied shut and the ankles are bound. The body is then wrapped in a white shroud several meters long.

Exchange 23: I would like to give my condolences to you and your family.

Soldier:	I would like to give my condolences to you and your family.	men thiZe we thiZing mashghalangiZa ginanch bildiryarin
Local:	Thank you.	thag bolung

While the male relatives are preparing the gravesite, the *kelin* of the house makes a plate of rice and each mourner in the house takes but one grain. She also bakes nine loaves of *cörek* bread to give to funeral guests. Male relatives gather on benches outside the house as a *mullah* (holy man) chants verses from the Quran. When the tomb has been prepared, the body is placed in a simple wooden coffin and carried from the house. On leaving, the coffin is knocked three times against the doorpost of the house as a final goodbye. Females remain at home while male relatives bear the coffin to the tomb.



© Casperblogger / flickr.com
Gravesyard in Nakhur

Exchange 24: Please be strong.

Soldier:	Please be strong.	mert bolung
Local:	We will try.	thinanshar

A *janazah*, or funeral prayer, is recited at the grave site and the body is removed from the wooden coffin and placed in the tomb with the head pointing in the direction of Mecca. The period of mourning lasts 40 days, with men wearing a black skullcap and women a white headscarf. During the period of mourning, the grieving family will observe no festivities.⁵⁹ It is very unlikely that a foreigner would be invited to participate in a funeral in Turkmenistan.

⁵⁸ The Khiva Interactive Guidebook. "Weddings and Kelin." No date.
<http://www.khiva.info/gb/festivals/lifecel/wedding.htm>

⁵⁹ The Khiva Interactive Guidebook. "Death and Dying." No date.
<http://www.khiva.info/gb/festivals/lifecel/death.htm>

Non-Religious Holidays

June is the only month that does not have an official state holiday. The country follows a western calendar and the first bank holiday is 1 January, New Year. On 12 January the nation observes a Remembrance Day as a day of solemnity. Flag Day is 19 February, a day for parades and nationalistic speeches by politicians. On this day in 1992 the country's new flag was adopted. On 8 March, the country honors women by observing International Women's Day.



During the same month, the ancient Persian spring festival, Novruz, is celebrated on three successive days: 20, 21, 22 March. It is the most ancient of Central Asian festivals and a time for festive meals, music, and regional fairs. The last Sunday in April is a rodeo day for southern Turkmenistan. On this day, the famous local breed of cavalry mount, the Akhal Teke horses, are put on show.

Victory Day on the 9th of May was added by the Soviets following the Second World War. It memorializes the collective victory of allied and socialist forces over the fascist forces of Mussolini, Hitler, and the Japanese. On Constitution Day, 18 May, Turkmenistanis observe the ratification of their post-independence constitution in 1992. The third Sunday of July, Harvest Day, was also introduced during the Soviet era to recognize record wheat production. Melon Day, on the other hand, is a farmer's festival. It is celebrated on the second Sunday in August. The second Saturday in September, Singers' Day, is a day on which the poets and singers of Turkmenistan are honored.

The victims of the devastating earthquake of 1948 that demolished the city of Ashgabat and killed 100,000 are remembered on Earthquake Day, 6 October. Although true independence came after the fall of the Soviet Union and the ratification of the constitution, 27 November is remembered as the day when in 1990 Turkmenistan declared itself an autonomous republic.⁶⁰ The last official bank holiday of the year, Neutrality Day on 12 December, reaffirms Turkmenistan's decision to remain neutral in regional and global conflict issues. The United Nations officially recognized this status in 1995.⁶¹

The Evil Eye

The belief in the "evil eye" as a destructive force is mixture of pre-Islamic superstition and Islamic faith, which lived undiminished through the Soviet era. Belief in the evil eye is alive and well throughout Turkmenistan's society. The evil eye is transmitted by the destructive gaze, intentional or accidental, of people with a "hard gaze." Most often it is

⁶⁰ Oriental Express Central Asia. "About Turkmenistan: Turkmenistan Holidays." 2003–2008. <http://turkmenistan.orexca.com/eng/info/holidays.html>

⁶¹ The United Nations Development Programme. "Turkmenistan: Resident Coordinator's Statement on the Occasion of Neutrality of Turkmenistan." 11 December 2006 http://www.undptkm.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=54&Itemid=52

by an older woman, envious of wealth or beauty. However, it can be unwittingly passed on through idle compliments or praise. Those most vulnerable to the effects of the evil eye are infants in the first 40 days of life, handsome children, and brides preparing for marriage. No one however is totally immune.

Human conduct can help ward off the “eye.” One can avoid ostentatious displays of wealth or beauty or idle compliments concerning children or valuable objects belonging to others. Artisans sometimes intentionally build flaws into their crafts to divert the glance of the eye, noting that only God is capable of perfect workmanship. There is a long list of practical things that can be done to drive away the eye. Quranic verses are displayed on the walls of houses or sealed inside triangular silver pendants worn about a woman’s neck to afford protection. Phials of salt, dried chili peppers, or ram’s horns are suspended above the front door of a house. Spitting on the ground three times and uttering a quick incantation will also remove the evil eye. The camel is thought to be a powerful ally in the fight against evil and camel hair bracelets or colorful weaves suspended from a car’s rear view mirror are conspicuous talismans. One of the most potent and immediate antidotes is the fumes of a burning Isfand herb, which fumigates a room and renders it free of the evil eye.⁶²



Courtesy of Turkmen.com
Annulet

⁶² The Khiva Interactive Guidebook. “The Evil Eye.” No date.
<http://www.khiva.info/gb/customs/evileye.htm>

Dos and Don'ts

Do remove your shoes when entering a mosque, holy site, or a private home. Shoes are dirty and require that the area be washed.

Do bring a small hospitality gift when invited to a Turkmenistani home. It says thank you and shows that you are gracious.

Do praise the quality of the food. It is a compliment to the husband of the house and to those in the kitchen.

Don't walk in front of a person who is praying. It invalidates the prayer.

Don't sit next to a member of the other sex in a public place unless he or she is your spouse or child. Doing so implies intimacy between the two parties.

Don't point a finger at anyone. It is an accusatory gesture.

Don't bring search dogs into a holy place or a home. Like pigs, Muslims consider them to be dirty animals that defile a place and require that it be cleansed.

Chapter 4: Urban Life

Urbanization

Currently around 45.8% of Turkmenistan's population, or 2.9 million people, live in the country's 20 cities. This rate has been fairly constant for the past 50 years, but appears to be on the verge of changing dramatically. With a population growth rate for the five principal cities of 4.9%, the Turkmenistani urban population is projected to reach nearly 60% by the year 2030.⁶³ With an unemployment rate of 60% for urban areas and nearly 90% of all workers on the state's payroll, there is little sign of urban vitality.⁶⁴ Most city housing dates from the Soviet era and is owned by the government. There are no visible incentives for privatization of housing. The state administered urban infrastructure, e.g., sanitation, electric grid, and roads of Turkmenistan's cities is threadbare and has not appreciated since the Soviet era.⁶⁵



Health Issues

Until 2004, health care in Turkmenistan was free to all citizens. What remains of the dismantled Soviet health care system is largely unavailable outside urban areas. During the Niyazov (Turkmenbashi) era the government's response to rising costs of health care was to limit the availability of health care services.

Exchange 25: Is Dr. Saparow in, sir?

Soldier:	Is Dr. Saparow in, sir?	doghtor saparov barmi?
Local:	No.	yok

In 2004, President Niyazov ordered all hospitals located outside the capital city to be closed and he fired 15,000 trained doctors and healthcare professionals. They were replaced the following year by military medical personnel.

Exchange 26: Is there a hospital nearby?

Soldier:	Is there a hospital nearby?	golayda kethelhana barmi?
Local:	Yes, in the center of town.	howa, shahering merkeZinde bar

In an attempt to reform the health care system, the government's primary care facilities in urban areas began to charge a minimal treatment fee to all patients. The country's

⁶³ United Nations Virtual University. "UN Development Programme. Globalis Interactive World Map." 2005. http://globalis.gvu.unu.edu/indicator_detail.cfm?Country=TM&IndicatorID=30

⁶⁴ IndexMundi.com. "Turkmenistan: Unemployment rate." 2007. http://www.indexmundi.com/turkmenistan/unemployment_rate.html

⁶⁵ Federal Research Division. Library of Congress "Turkmenistan." February 2007. <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles/Turkmenistan.pdf>

hospitals and medical laboratories are substandard and lack modern diagnostic and treatment facilities.

Exchange 27: May I use your phone?

Soldier:	May I use your phone?	thiZing telefoningiZi ulanmak mUmkinmi?
Local:	Sure.	howa

The only reliable and advanced medical care in the country exists at a few select private hospitals such as the private clinic Turkmenbashi had built for himself in the 1990s. The cost of treatment there is far above the budget of the average citizen. Lacking access to affordable medical care, many Turkmenistanis in both urban and rural areas have turned to traditional healers⁶⁶

Exchange 28: Do you know what is wrong?

Soldier:	Do you know what is wrong?	name boZulandighini bilyangiZmi?
Local:	No.	yok

As a result of the decline in health care over the ten year period from 1994 to 2004, death rates of mothers and children have risen dramatically to levels higher than other Central Asian countries. President Berdimuhamedov has yet to send clear and unambiguous signals that his government tends to part with the old health care policies.⁶⁷

Education

With more than 35% of Turkmenistan’s population under the age of 15, education and indoctrination of the young is a major national concern. The system has undergone substantial revision since independence. Early in the Niyazov era, Russian as a language of instruction in secondary schools and Russian textbooks was replaced by Turkmen language curricula and instruction. The main text in all schools, however, was Turkmenbashi’s book of moral principles and national mythology, the *Ruhnama*. Other changes, introduced in the Niyazov era linger on. In May 2005, Turkmenbashi announced that foreign academic degrees would no longer be recognized in Turkmenistan. As a result, foreign professionals working or teaching in the country were summarily dismissed. Likewise, Turkmenistanis studying abroad were advised to either to return without a degree and work for the welfare of the nation or search for employment abroad.⁶⁸



⁶⁶ *Tribal Nation: The making of Soviet Turkmenistan* p. 85. Edgard, Adrienne Lynn.. 2004. Princeton University Press.

⁶⁷ World Health Organization. Europe. Making Pregnancy Safer. “Country Profile: Turkmenistan.” 2007. http://www.euro.who.int/document/MPS/TKM_MPSEURO_countryprofile.pdf

⁶⁸ Eurasianet. “Turkmenistan’s Education System in Downward Spiral.” 5 May 2005. <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/rights/articles/eav050504.shtml>

In practice, education is funded and administered by the state. It begins with the *bagcha* or kindergarten and is followed by *mekdep* or primary (principal) school. Attendance here is mandatory up to the higher secondary level, which is currently at grade 10. Classrooms throughout the country are overcrowded and poorly heated in winter months. Teachers are poorly paid and are required to provide their pupils with pencils and paper. They lack sanitary facilities and instructional paraphernalia, such as labs and white boards. Instruction is still suspended from June to September so that children can help with the cotton harvest.

However, the curriculum which used to be solely an instrument of political indoctrination is being reformed. Technical subjects and foreign languages, for example, English, are being added, as well as practical vocational training. Unfortunately, attendance at levels above the basic nine years is by appointment, i.e., qualification testing. At this point, experts report that advanced studies at the nation's few higher secondary schools and the two universities in Ashgabat are only possible through the payment of bribes to school authorities. These bribes are reported to run from the equivalent of USD 4,000 to 5,000.⁶⁹

Favorite Pastimes

The idea of leisure time in which the average Turkmenistani can indulge in unregulated pastimes is still fairly new. The traditional pastime of sitting in cafes drinking tea or coffee and gossiping with friends has not disappeared. However, with high unemployment and a surplus of free time on the part of many, leisure activities including sport still come under government scrutiny.



Soccer is one of the sports in which young men can freely participate. Its national team is a member of the International Football Federation (FIFA), and survival of the sport in Turkmenistan depends on the USD 250,000 yearly support of FIFA. However, the government has not always made good on its promise to grant FIFA television rights and the right to schedule international matches. During a recent world cup match, Turkmenistan was the only nation among 207 member nations whose citizens weren't permitted to view the soccer championship.⁷⁰ Other sports that are endorsed by the government are chess, volleyball, wrestling and martial arts. The government encourages regional tournaments in these activities, all of which are conspicuously male activities.⁷¹

⁶⁹ Country-Studies.com Turkmenistan: Education. No date. <http://www.country-studies.com/turkmenistan/education.html>

⁷⁰ ESPN Soccer. "World Tournament on course for record 30 billion viewers." 27 June 2006. <http://sports.espn.go.com/espn/wire?section=soccer&id=2501590>

⁷¹ Girl Solo in Arabia. McIntyre, Carolyn. "A Day at the Races, Tolkuchka Bazaar, and the Evil Eye." 3 October 2006. http://girlsoloinarabia.typepad.com/girl_solo_in_arabia/turkmenistan/index.html

Another national pastime is attending horse shows or horse races where one may see the famed Akhal-Teke horse in the spring and fall. Major travel agencies offer multiple day treks on horseback through the desert oases and the mountains.⁷² The Olympic Games, however, are one area where women have been free to participate since 1996. Although to date, the country has won no medals, Turkmenistan did send nine athletes, six men and three women, to the games in Athens, Greece. Women are free to participate in cultural festivals such as national music and dance troupes where traditional folk art forms are portrayed.



Restaurants

Most Turkmenistanis would agree that the best original dishes are not served in the public restaurants of the country, but rather at traditional Turkmen homes. Apart from the prohibitive cost of dining out, most Turkmenistani people rarely eat at restaurants except for weddings and celebratory events.

Exchange 29: Put this all in one bill.

Soldier:	Put this all in one bill.	bularing hemethini bir hathawa goshaying
Local:	Okay.	bolyar

The major hotels in the country's largest cities have kitchens that feature national dishes as well as Chinese, Indian, and Arabian cuisine.

Exchange 30: I'd like some hot soup.

Soldier:	I'd like some hot soup.	men giZghin chorwa ithleyarin
Local:	Sure.	bolyar

Most of the international hotels and restaurants in Ashgabat are located along the broad avenue, Archabil Shayoly, in the Berzengi District in the southern part of the city. For those looking for a quick snack or the Turkmen version of fast food, the cheaper food stalls around the bazaars and truck/bus stops offer vegetarian *somsas* (deep fried stuffed pastry), *fitchi* (*somsa* stuffed with lamb or camel meat), and *shashliks* (meat kabobs).

Exchange 31: What type of meat is this?

Soldier:	What type of meat is this?	bu nahili et?
Local:	Lamb.	goyun eti

⁷²TripAdvisor.com. Turkmen Akhalteke Horse trekkings. 2008.
http://www.tripadvisor.com/Attraction_Review-g293966-d537624-Reviews-Turkmen_Akhalteke_Horse_Trekkings-Ashgabat.html



Dessert at Turkmen restaurants usually consists of a nut pastry saturated with syrup, *shek-sheki*, or some fruit. Seasonal fruits like grapes, pomegranates, or melons are the best option.

Exchange 32: Do you have a dessert?

Soldier:	Do you have a dessert?	thiZde desertler barmi?
Local:	Yes, we have shek-sheki.	howa, biZde sheksheki bar

It is customary for restaurants and cafes to present a group of guests with a single check. Frequently the check is little more than a piece of paper with a number scribbled on it with no accounting or itemization. It is assumed that guests know the cost of their tea or snack.

Exchange 33: I would like coffee or tea.

Soldier:	I would like coffee or tea.	men kofe yada chay ithleyarin
Local:	Sure.	bolyar

The group leader is usually the one who gets the check. Turkmenistanis don't know the concept of "going dutch," and would be offended by any arrangement where a group member insists on paying his own way. In addition, if a visitor engages a driver or guide over a period of one or more days, it is wholly appropriate for him to be invited to dine with the tour group or with those he is assisting.

Exchange 34: Can I have my total bill, please?

Soldier:	Can I have my total bill, please?	mening hathawiming jemini getirip bilerthingiZmi?
Local:	Yes, of course.	howa, elwetde

In addition to serving coffee and tea, the cafes often feature tea sweets and will offer the equivalent morning breakfast of coffee and bread or savory pastry. All restaurants close at 23:00 and very few night spots have a license to operate beyond this curfew hour.

Exchange 35: Are you still serving breakfast?

Soldier:	Are you still serving breakfast?	thiZ shu waghtam ertirlik beryangiZmi?
Local:	Yes.	howa

Dining out is little different from being invited to dinner at a Turkmenistani house when it comes to the courtesies of the table and to etiquette.

Exchange 36: May I have a glass of water?

Soldier:	May I have a glass of water?	bir stakan thu thoramak mUmkinmi?
Local:	Yes, right away.	howa, haZir

Turkmenistanis wash their hands before a meal and again after the meal. It is part of Islamic hygiene; the visitor who observes these local customs endears himself to local hosts. Restaurants will usually have an area devoted to such ablutions adjacent to rest room facilities.

Exchange 37: Where is your restroom?

Soldier:	Where is your restroom?	tualet nirede?
Local:	That room to your left, over there.	shol yerde chepdaki otogh

The Market Place

Main bazaars in Turkmenistan's major cities, like the Tolkuchka in Ashgabat, are colorful, chaotic places offering contrasting sites. It is not uncommon to see reluctant camels being hoisted onto pickup trucks while next door, Korean ladies run stalls selling pickled carrots, and Turkmen merchants show their deep red Tekke carpets.

Exchange 38: Is the bazaar nearby?

Soldier:	Is the bazaar nearby?	golayda baZar barmi?
Local:	Yes, over there on the right.	howa, ol yerde thagh tarapda

There are stalls selling western style clothing, such as jeans, jackets, shirts, and shoes made in China, and traditional Turkmen clothing like *telpeks* (sheepskin hats) and *takhyas* (embroidered skull caps). Fabrics can be purchased by the meter in bulk for tailoring. Selections of fabrics including cotton and silks from Pakistan, India, and China, are available in plain colors or in *alaja* or colorful patterns.



Exchange 39: Do you sell *alaja*?

Soldier:	Do you sell <i>alaja</i> ?	thiZ alaja thatyangiZmi?
Local:	Yes.	howa

In addition, traditional jewelry, talismans to ward off the evil eye, and Soviet era memorabilia can be found in most markets. Visitors can freely ask the merchants if they have additional varieties, sizes, or colors available for each item.

Exchange 40: Do you have any more of these?

Soldier:	Do you have any more of these?	shulardan bashgha yene barmi?
Local:	No.	yok

A word of caution on the topic of carpets: items older than 50 years may not be exported from the country and all carpets must be certified by the local branch of the “Expert Commission,” usually adjacent to any bazaar dealing in carpets. Carpet dealers can advise a customer on where and how to obtain the documents and may even assist the customer in obtaining the required certificate.



Exchange 41: May I examine this close up?

Soldier:	May I examine this close up?	men shunga gowuja therethem bolyarmi?
Local:	Sure.	bolya

A visitor contemplating the purchase of a carpet should be aware that a fair purchase price is obtained only through bargaining. Bargaining in turn requires the buyer to know the fair market value of an item, usually acquired by shopping around at other vendors. Asian wisdom holds that only fools attempt to purchase without bargaining.

Exchange 42: Can I buy a carpet with this much money?

Soldier:	Can I buy a carpet with this much money?	men shu pula hali thatin alip bilerinmi?
Local:	No.	yok

Some markets are only open on select days of the week, while others are open daily from about 08:00 to 14:00, at which time they close for lunch. Most reopen around 16:00 and remain open well into the evening.

Exchange 43: How much longer will you be here?

Soldier:	How much longer will you be here?	thiZ shu yerde yene nache waght bolarthingiZ?
Local:	Three more hours.	yene Uch thaghat

Merchants in Turkmenistan are eager to accept foreign currency in business transactions and there is a black market in currency exchange. It is illegal for both the merchant and the customer.

Exchange 44: Can you give me change for this?

Soldier:	Can you give me change for this?	thiZ shUni bEldUrip bilyangiZmi?
Local:	No.	yok

Only merchants in international hotels are prepared to accept major credit cards. Purchases made in the local bazaar must be made using the local currency. The only legal tender for the country is the Turkmen manat (TMM) which is subdivided into 100 tenge. At the beginning of 2008, the exchange rate was USD 1.00 = TMM 5,200.

Exchange 45: Do you accept U.S. currency?

Soldier:	Do you accept U.S. currency?	thiZ amerikan dolarini kawul edyangiZmi?
Local:	No we only accept manat.	yok, biZ dinge manat kawul edyari

The manat is a currency that is not traded on foreign markets and therefore cannot be bought or sold outside the country. Moreover, once exchanged, manat cannot be converted back into a western currency.

Exchange 46: Please, buy something from me.

Local:	Please, buy something from me.	gayrat eding menden bir Zat thatin aling
Soldier:	Sorry, I have no money left.	baghishlang, mende bashgha pul yok

Area surrounding public markets and bazaars are havens for touts and petty thieves who prey on visitors and people who look as if they are lost. Aggressive begging has become a problem. Walk with a purpose and never show valuables like expensive jewelry, watches, or large amounts of currency in public places.

Exchange 47: Give me money

Local:	Give me money	manga pulingiZi bering
Soldier:	I don't have any.	mende pul yok

Keep valuable documents like passports in deep pockets or security pouches where they cannot be easily lifted by a pickpocket.⁷³

Transportation

Transportation in urban areas like Ashgabat is plentiful. The green and white buses and trolleys of the public transport system are modern and inexpensive, but during commuting hours they can be crowded. Currently, the inner city fare is 50 manat.



© yakiker / flickr.com
Bus in Ashgabat

Exchange 48: Will the bus be here soon?

Soldier:	Will the bus be here soon?	avtobus bathim gelermi?
Local:	Yes.	howa

There are taxis and the basic fare is 5,000 manat for short trips and 10,000 for trips across town. In addition, there are taxis for hire called *mashrutkas* that travel outside the city and can be used for long distance travel. Fares must be negotiated in advance.

⁷³ Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. Australian Government. "Travel Advice: Turkmenistan." 5 December 2007. <http://www.smartraveller.gov.au/zw-cgi/view/Advice/Turkmenistan>

Exchange 49: Where can I get a cab?

Soldier:	Where can I get a cab?	men nirede taksi tutup bilerin?
Local:	Over there.	shol yerde

Car rental is not popular in Turkmenistan, but it can be arranged through travel offices in the major international hotels of Ashgabat. Rental conditions are contingent upon the driver having a valid international driving license and a major credit card recognized in Central Asia, i.e., Visa or Master Card.

Exchange 50: Where can I rent a car?

Soldier:	Where can I rent a car?	men nirede mashin prokada alip bilyan?
Local:	Downtown.	shaherde

A good alternative is the hired taxi that can be arranged for prolonged period of time at rates that approximate those of car rental.

Chapter 5: Rural Life

Rural Economy

With 26% of the country’s GDP⁷⁴ coming from the farming sector’s cotton and wheat crops, and more than 50% of the population depending on farming for a livelihood, rural economy is a vital issue.⁷⁵ Nearly 55% of the total population of Turkmenistan lives and works in rural areas. The lives of farmers have changed little since independence. They have lived for a generation expecting realistic rural economic reforms. The blueprint for the long-awaited reform was Turkmenbashi’s “Ten Years of Prosperity” program announced in 1992.⁷⁶ In the same year, he declared that the road to privatization and free market economy for all citizens was to be paved by the offer of free electricity, water, and energy. Turkmenbashi (former president Nyazov) died in 2006 and President Berdimuhamedov has yet to make good on his predecessor’s promises.



© Caspellblogger / flickr.com
Turkmenistani couple in their yurt

Land Ownership

In 1997–98, most farmers were designated “lease holders,” eligible to qualify for ownership of plots of land less than 50 hectares (123.5 acres) in size.⁷⁷ However, outright ownership could only take place under strict conditions. The farmer had to demonstrate that he could transform the land, often arid, into agriculturally productive land within 24 months and without government subsidy for earth moving and irrigation. Many have failed to meet this criterion.⁷⁸

Exchange 51: Do you own this land?

Soldier:	Do you own this land?	thiZ shu yering eyethimi?
Local:	Yes.	howa

In practice then, the Soviet system of state control of orders continues to function as before. Cotton and wheat crops are cultivated under the state order system and then

⁷⁴ GDP, or gross domestic product, is one means of measuring the size of a country’s economy. It is the sum total value of all goods and services produced in a country in one year.

⁷⁵ The World Bank Group. “Turkmenistan Country Brief 2003.” September 2003.

<http://Inweb18.worldbank.org/eca/eca.nsf/ExtECADocbyUnid/448D2726890D48CC85256D5D006884C3?Opendocument>

⁷⁶ Turkmens.com. “All About Turkmenistan: Economy.” No date.

<http://www.turkmens.com/Turkmenistan.html>

⁷⁷ World Bank. “Turkmenistan Country Brief 2007.” September 2006.

<http://go.worldbank.org/7I1D81Y1C0>

⁷⁸ World Bank Publications. *Turkmenistan: An Assessment of Leasehold-Based Farm Restructuring*.

Lerman, Zvi & Karen McConnell Brooks. “Historical Background and Chronology of Legal Measures in Land Reform – The Peasant Association: Managers’ Perspective [p. 29–63].” 2001.

<http://books.google.com/books?id=Kbjytzg9La4C&pg=PA21&lpg=PA21&dq=land+ownership+turkmenistan&source=web&ots=osyfcvHwJ9&sig=ZNub78hojJsQKJMS17Td7t85wlg>

bought by the state at below-market prices.⁷⁹ Foreign developmental aid to the rural sector has come to a halt because of a lack of progress in privatization and transition to a free market environment. The World Bank, too, has stopped all developmental loans because Turkmenistan has failed to provide debt disclosures and has failed to meet public resource management standards.

Health Issues

Health care in rural areas of Turkmenistan is divided into level 1 and level 2 care by the Ministry of Health. Level 1 facilities, called *oba saglyk oyu*, are primary care facilities which serve a population of around 1,500.

Exchange 52: Is there a medical clinic nearby?

Soldier:	Is there a medical clinic nearby?	golayda klinika barmi?
Local:	Yes, over there.	howa, o tayda



Courtesy of USAID
Primary health care provided by family nurses

They are usually staffed by a midwife for childbirth and a *feldsher* or military medic who treats injuries and refers serious cases to regional or town clinics. Level 2 care is described as hospital care at the district level similar to urban clinics, *saker saglyk oyu*.

Exchange 53: My arm is broken, can you help me?

Soldier:	My arm is broken, can you help me?	mening elim dEwUldi, thiZ manga kEmEk edip bilerthingiZmi?
Local:	Yes, I can help you.	howa, men thiZe kEmEk edip bilerin

Most of these “hospitals” have fewer than 25 beds and little or no medicine and equipment. There is a critical shortage of all medicines, antibiotics and anesthetics in particular.⁸⁰ Typhoid, vivax malaria (inert), hepatitis, and tuberculosis are among the health hazards of rural Turkmenistan..

Exchange 54: What is your telephone number?

Soldier:	What is your telephone number?	thiZing telefon nomeringiZ nache?
Local:	My phone number is 22-25-85	mening telefon nomerim yighrimi iki yighrimi bash theghthen bash

⁷⁹ The World Bank. “Turkmenistan: Country Brief 2007.” September 2006. <http://go.worldbank.org/7I1D81Y1C0>

⁸⁰ European Observatory on Health Care Systems. “Health Care Systems in Transition: Turkmenistan.” 2000. <http://www.euro.who.int/document/e70316.pdf>

The United States was instrumental in 2007 in providing medicines, machines, and expertise to upgrade medical care in the country.⁸¹

Education

The status of schooling in rural areas of Turkmenistan remains low. The law mandates that children attend basic schooling, but they attend classrooms with few textbooks, poor facilities, and a limited number of teachers.

Exchange 55: Is there a school nearby?

Soldier:	Is there a school nearby?	godayda mekdep barmi?
Local:	Yes.	howa

In the years before his death, Turkmenbashi dismissed 12,000 primary and secondary teachers. In their place, students have been required to memorize large portions of the *Ruhnama*, Niyazov’s book of spiritual wisdom. Children continue to learn their geography, history, and moral education from this book.

Exchange 56: Do your children go to school?

Soldier:	Do your children go to school?	mekdebe okuwchilar gatnayarlarmi?
Local:	Yes.	howa

Official policy tends to substitute for subjects that might encourage independent thought. In a country where 40% of the population is below the age of 14, the future impact of these conditions is likely to be devastating.⁸²

Nomadic Heritage

Turkmenistan was largely a nomadic culture until it fell under the banner of Soviet Central Asia in the late 1920s. As nomads they were hunters and gatherers. Their movements were based on the need to find seasonal hunting and harvesting. The fat-tailed Karakul Sheep, the oldest domesticated breed of sheep, is a product of the animal husbandry of Turkmen tribes as is the Akhal-Teke horse. The principal tribes, the Yomuts, Choudirs, Ersaris, Sariks, Salirs, Teke, and Göklengs ringed the great desert near the country’s borders in clockwise fashion.

Exchange 57: Do you know this area very well?

Soldier:	Do you know this area very well?	thiZ shu yerlere beletmi?
Local:	Yes.	howa

⁸¹ USAID Europe and Asian. “Turkmenistan.” 31 Dec 2007. http://www.usaid.gov/locations/europe_eurasia/car/txpage.html

⁸² IRIN UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. “Turkmenistan: Focus on Education.” 9 July 2003. <http://www.irinnews.org/report.aspx?reportid=20460>

Stalin corralled the tribes into collective farms and rural settlements. There they became pastoralists, living in small houses with their families, breeding domesticated animals and engaging in subsistence farming. Prior to their life in the *kolkhoze* or collective farms of the Soviet era, they grew just enough food to meet the needs of their families and flocks. The Soviets transformed the tribesmen into cotton and grain farmers. Nonetheless, the tribes were independent of one another, each keeping to its tribal territory. Each had its own distinct subculture, dialect, traditions of art and jewelry, and distinctive carpet weave designs.⁸³

Traditional Dress

The typical dress for a Turkmen woman in both the city and countryside is a long red dress called a *kurta*. It is a floor-length garment made of homespun silk woven on narrow looms. The straight cut gives it a graceful flair. The neckline is embroidered in brightly colored silk usually added by the wearer or her mother. In addition to embroidery, the wearing of silver jewelry is mandatory. The *kurta* is sometimes presented as part of the pre-marriage dowry. Under the *kurta* a woman wears a trouser-like garment called *balak*.⁸⁴ Women always wear their hair pulled back, often in braids, and covered by a scarf.

A Turkmen man wears loose-fitting blue trousers stuffed into tall boots. Over this he wears a white shirt covered by a heavy red silk jacket with golden stripes. A man's hat, the furry *telpék*, may be white, brown, or black according to the color of the sheep who yielded its skin for the hat. The former president, Turkmenbashi, encouraged Turkmenistanis to wear their traditional dress. Reports from late 2007 show that the government continues to enforce the ban on western dress for government employees while encouraging all citizens to wear their national dress with pride.⁸⁵



Courtesy of Chahana.com
Traditional women's dress

Gender Issues

Nowhere is the patriarchal nature of Turkmen culture more obvious than in rural areas. Yet, in spite of the leadership role of men, the role of women in rural Turkmenistan is different from that of other Islamic societies. Women tend to embrace a traditional female role, clearly separate from that of men, including child care, cooking, cleaning, care of cows and sheep, and the spinning, dying, and weaving of wool. As a consequence, women frequently miss out on opportunities for education that would permit them to enter the job market. During the summer, the world of men and women come together in the cotton fields where the entire family including children help to bring in the annual

⁸³ *Tribal nation: The Making of Soviet Turkmenistan*. Edgar, Adrienne Lynn. "Source of Identity Among the Turkmen [p. 22]." 2004. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press

⁸⁴ Powerhousemuseum.com. "Woman's Dress (Kurta), Turkmen, Silk/cotton." 2003
<http://www.powerhousemuseum.com/collection/database/?irn=319867>

⁸⁵ HRS. Human Rights Service. Turkmenistan: The State Tightens Dress Code Regulations. 11 Oct 2007.
<http://www.rights.no/publisher/publisher.asp?id=52&tekstid=963>

harvest. Women are expected to be reserved and non-confrontational, but have never been subjected to seclusion or required to wear face veils.⁸⁶

Transportation

The transportation network of Turkmenistan is still principally geared to conveying portable exports out of the country and bringing imports into the country. Its network of roads has been upgraded since independence and currently 81% of its 24,000 km roads, or 19,440 km (11,665 mi), are paved.⁸⁷

Exchange 58: Is there a train station nearby?

Soldier:	Is there a train station nearby?	golayda vokZal barmi?
Local:	No.	yok

More than 2,500 km (1,500 mi) of Soviet-era rail lines crisscross the country. However, train service, while inexpensive, is limited and tends to be very slow; it takes 16 hours to travel from Turkmenbashi to Ashgabat. The same distance is covered by bus in less than half that time. Only cargo crosses the frontier by truck or train; there are no cross-border buses or passenger trains.



Courtesy of Wikipedia
Soviet era train station

Exchange 59: Is there lodging nearby?

Soldier:	Is there lodging nearby?	golayda mihmanhana barmi?
Local:	Yes.	howa

There is a regular ferry service operating between Turkmenbashi and Baku in Azerbaijan. Bus service connecting the major cities of Turkmenistan is inexpensive, reliable and regular. This is in part due to the fact that gasoline is heavily subsidized by the government.

Visitors desiring to cross into a neighboring country by land route are required to take a bus or taxi to a frontier post and then to walk across the border. Border crossings into Iran and Uzbekistan are fairly uncomplicated.⁸⁸

Exchange 60: Can you take me there?

Soldier:	Can you take me there?	thiZ meni shol yere akidip bilyangiZmi?
Local:	Yes, I can.	howa, bilyan

Road conditions in Turkmenistan make driving difficult and sometimes dangerous. Long stretches of highway are often unmarked. Extreme caution is urged when attempting to drive at night, since roads are poorly maintained, not lighted, and

⁸⁶ Country Studies. "Turkmenistan: Social Structure." 1996. <http://countrystudies.us/turkmenistan/11.htm>

⁸⁷ United Nations Conference on Trade and Development UNCTAD. "Turkmenistan." 2005 http://www.unctad.org/sections/ldc_dir/docs/lldc-tuk.pdf

⁸⁸ Burke, Andrew & Elliot, Mark. Iran [p. 333.]. 2004. Lonely Planet Press. Oakland, CA.

construction sites are not well demarcated. Likewise, many vehicles travel at night with defective lighting. Roadside assistance is not available.

Exchange 61: Is there a gas station nearby?

Soldier:	Is there a gas station nearby?	golayda benZapravka barmi?
Local:	Yes.	howa

Visitors may bring private vehicles into the country for a limited time using transit permits available at the border crossing points, but should be aware that third party insurance and vehicle permits are required and are expensive. Eastern Turkmenistan is linked with points in the west by the Turkmenbashi–Ashgabat–Charejew Highway.



© Carpetlogger / flickr.com
Roadside mechanic in Turkmenistan

Exchange 62: Is there a good auto mechanic nearby?

Soldier:	Is there a good auto mechanic nearby?	golayda gowi mehanik barmi?
Local:	Yes.	howa

The national air carrier, Turkmenistan Air Lines, services Asian and Middle Eastern countries, including China, India, Pakistan; and Saudi Arabia, as well as Italy and Slovakia in Western Europe. All international air traffic departs from the Ashgabat International Airport.⁸⁹

Exchange 63: Which road leads to the airport?

Soldier:	Which road leads to the airport?	haythi yol aeraporda akidyar?
Local:	The road heading east.	gUndoghara tarap gidyan akidyar

Who is in Charge?

The elected elder in a rural district is the mayor. He presides over the *gengesh* or village council which is also an elected body.

Exchange 64: Does your mayor live here?

Soldier:	Does your mayor live here?	thiZing hakimingiZ shu yerde yashayami?
Local:	Yes.	howa

⁸⁹ Alloexpat.com. “Getting Around in Turkmenistan/Turkmenistan Transportation.” No date. http://www.alloexpat.com/turkmenistan_expats_forum/getting-around-in-turkmenistan-turkmenistan-transportation-t458.html

Among his duties are the: 1) regulation of all enterprises in the area; 2) maintenance of economic, social, and cultural relations in the area; and 3) management of human resources in the area.⁹⁰

Exchange 65: Can you take me to your mayor?

Soldier:	Can you take me to your mayor?	thiZ meni hakiming yanina akidip bilerthingiZmi?
Local:	Yes.	howa

Police and security officials operating in a rural area are likely to coordinate with the office of the *archyn* (a village elder who functions as a mayor), since he is usually acquainted with the history of each family in his area. Likewise, a stranger who is looking for assistance is likely to be referred to this elected official for help.

Exchange 66: Respected mayor, we need your help / advice / opinion.

Soldier:	Respected mayor, we need your help / advice / opinion.	hormatli hakim, biZe thiZing kEmEghingiZ / teklibingiZ / pikiringiZ gerek
Local:	Yes.	howa

Checkpoints

The relative high frequency of checkpoints outside cities and along the highways of Turkmenistan signals the state’s concern for internal security. Al-Qaeda, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, and the Eastern Turkestan Islamic Movement continue to operate in Central Asia.



© Antonio Sinen
Turkmenistan soldiers

Exchange 67: Where is the nearest checkpoint?

Soldier:	Where is the nearest checkpoint?	ing golay barlagh nokadi nirede?
Local:	It’s two kilometers.	iki kilometrden

As a result, surveillance of foreigners is very common and may include monitoring of all communications as well as hotel searches. Border regions with neighboring countries are often designated “restricted zones” and foreigners are routinely excluded from these areas.

Exchange 68: Did these people threaten you?

Soldier:	Did these people threaten you?	shu adamlar thiZe aZar berdilermi?
Local:	No.	yok

⁹⁰ NCA New Central Asia. “Gengesh – The Heart of Rural Reforms in Turkmenistan.” 15 January 2008. <http://www.newscentralasia.net/Articles-and-Reports/205.html>

This is particularly true of the border region near Afghanistan. Security personnel are particularly interested in interdicting the movement of terrorists and weapons across frontiers and through countries.

Exchange 69: Is this all the ID you have?

Soldier:	Is this all the ID you have?	shu thiZing bar dokumentleringiZmi?
Local:	Yes.	howa

Both uniformed and plainclothes police and military officials regularly stop cars and ask to see passports and travel documents. These checks, which increase in frequency after daylight hours, may entail vehicle searches.

Exchange 70: Show us the car registration.

Soldier:	Show us the car registration.	mashining shahadatnamathini gErkEZing
Local:	OK.	bolya

During a search, all passengers in a vehicle will be asked to exit the vehicle and identify themselves. Although unlikely, a physical search of one's person could follow if there are any irregularities in documentation.

Exchange 71: Please get out of the car.

Soldier:	Please get out of the car.	mashindan dUshengiZlang
Local:	OK.	bolya

Impatience at a checkpoint or during a search seldom pays off as police are empowered to issue bad conduct citation which must be paid within 12 hours and which can eventually result in seizure of vehicles.⁹¹

Exchange 72: Are you carrying any guns?

Soldier:	Are you carrying any guns?	thiZing yaningiZda yaraghlar barmi?
Local:	Yes.	howa

⁹¹ Bureau of Consular Affairs. U.S. Department of State. "Turkmenistan." 20 September 2007. http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_1047.html

Landmines

Turkmenistan is a signatory to the Land Mine Treaty of 1997, although it has not passed any national legislation or implemented measures required by Article 9 of the Treaty, all of which forbid the purchase, sale of, transfer, or manufacture of landmines.

Exchange 73: Is this area mined?

Soldier:	Is this area mined?	shu tEwErEk minalananmi?
Local:	Yes.	howa

On 6 April 2006, the government did submit documentation stating that old stocks, including 6,631,771 landmines inherited from the Soviet Union, had been completely destroyed and that it was in full compliance with the Treaty. Furthermore, the government states that no border regions are mined and that there have been no known casualties as a result of land mines.⁹²

⁹² Landmine Monitor. "LM Report 2006. Turkmenistan." October 2006. <http://www.icbl.org/cgi-bin/lmcountry.pl?country=turkmenistan&year=country>

Chapter 6 Family Life

The Typical Household

The extended family is the central social unit of Turkmenistan's society. Turkmen culture is traditionally patriarchal. This reflects the Islamic influence which assigns a leadership role in the family to fathers and elder male figures.

Exchange 74: How many people live in this house?

Soldier:	How many people live in this house?	shu Eyde nache adam yashayar?
Local:	Ten.	on

Women, on the other hand, are under the authority of a husband or father and are expected to maintain the household. This includes food preparation, child care, and the spinning, dying, and weaving of wool. Within the household, parents are strict disciplinarians.



© Carpetblogger / flickr.com
Women and children in a nomad village

Exchange 75: Does your family live here?

Soldier:	Does your family live here?	thiZing mashgalangiZ shu yerde yashayami?
Local:	Yes.	howa

Women leave their families to live with their husband's family in his father's household.

Exchange 76: Is this your entire family?

Soldier:	Is this your entire family?	shu thiZing tutush mashgalangiZmi?
Local:	Yes.	howa

Although the women leave, their brothers act as the link to their birth families after they marry and become members of another household.

Exchange 77: Do you have any brothers?

Soldier:	Do you have any brothers?	thiZing doghanlaringiZ barmi?
Local:	Yes.	howa

It is common for brothers to be the only family members who visit as they are the ones responsible for the safety of their sisters.⁹³ Large families are considered a blessing and female infertility and would be a reason for divorce. Turkmen custom in this case is for a man to marry another woman and keep the first wife.

Exchange 78: Where do you work, sir?

Soldier:	Where do you work, sir?	jenap, thiZ ishleyangiZmi?
Local:	I am a farmer, sir.	jenap, men fermer

When a man is in his 30s, he leaves his father’s household with his wife and children and forms a household of his own. He takes with him part of his father’s wealth and establishes his own independent livelihood.⁹⁴ If he is the youngest male in his family, he will have the honor and responsibility for taking care of his parents when they are elderly.

Exchange 79: Are you the only person in your family who has a job?

Soldier:	Are you the only person in your family who has a job?	thiZing mashgalangiZda dinge thiZ ishlimi?
Local:	No.	yok

Gender Issues

Male children are welcomed into the family with great fanfare. They will be the ones their parents will rely on as they advance into old age, and for support after they are too old to work.

Exchange 80: Are you married?

Soldier:	Are you married?	thiZ EylEenmi?
Local:	No.	yok

Girls, by contrast, are viewed as temporary members of the family whose place will be the household into which they marry. Brothers and sisters are often close. Long-standing taboos against male–female socialization mean that for girls, their brothers are the only male peers with whom they will have close contact until they marry.

Male children have greater freedom to move about the community as they grow up; girls must stick close to their mothers. As they mature sexually, they are expected to guard their virginity. In this, they are assisted by the



© Fraser Lewy
Turkmenistan boys in the Karakum desert

⁹³ *Tradition and Society in Turkmenistan: Gender, Oral Culture and Song*. Blackwell, Carole. “Family Relationships [p. 49].” 2001. Biddles Ltd. <http://books.google.com/books?hl=en&id=ZwUSitzGojkC&dq=tradition+and+society+in+turkmenistan&printsec=frontcover&source=web&ots=CGpeo4d5jy&sig=uyctOZgui35urU31e8uLTq4e7fc#PPA50,M1>

⁹⁴ *Cultures of the World: Turkmenistan*. Knowlton, MaryLee [p. 73–89]. 2006. White Plains, NY: Marshal Cavendish Press.

family, which shelters them from conduct with males outside the family that might compromise their honor.⁹⁵

Exchange 81: Did you grow up here?

Soldier:	Did you grow up here?	thiZ shu yerde EsdUngiZmi?
Local:	Yes.	howa

Marriage

Article 25 of the Turkmenistan Constitution of 1992, which provides guidance on marriage, families, and children, only speaks of men and women who “reach the age of marriage.”⁹⁶ In practice, this has come to mean the old Soviet era standard of 16 years for females and 18 for males.

Exchange 82: Is this your wife?

Soldier:	Is this your wife?	bu thiZing ayalingiZmi?
Local:	Yes.	howa

However, since marriages are usually arranged, bride selection and planning may begin earlier. President Niyazov in 2005 scrapped his 2001 edict imposing a USD 50,000 penalty on foreigners who married native Turkmenistani women outside Turkmenistan. The decree was originally meant to stem the tide of cross-border elopement and kidnapping, i.e., men living in ethnic enclaves in border countries like Uzbekistan who enticed women across the border for marriage, thereby avoiding payment of a dowry.⁹⁷



© Fraser Leary
Wedding in Ashgabat

Exchange 83: Are these people part of your family?

Soldier:	Are these people part of your family?	shu adamlar thiZing mashgalangiZdanmi?
Local:	No.	yok

Generally, the material investment that a man’s family contributes to the marriage of a son insures abiding family concern for the success of the marriage. In addition, the scrutiny given to the character of the bride or groom and to their individual families aims at eliminating future impediments to the well-being of the new family and acts as insurance against divorce down the road.

⁹⁵ *Tradition and Society in Turkmenistan: Gender, Oral Culture and Song*. Blackwell, Carole. “Family Relationships [p. 49].” 2001. Biddles Ltd.
<http://books.google.com/books?hl=en&id=ZwUSitzGojkC&dq=tradition+and+society+in+turkmenistan&printsec=frontcover&source=web&ots=CGpeo4d5jy&sig=uycOZgui35urU31e8uLTq4e7fc#PPA50,M1>

⁹⁶ University of Texas Arlington. “Constitution of Turkmenistan.” 1997.
<http://www.uta.edu/cpsees/TURKCON.htm>

⁹⁷ Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty. “Turkmenistan: Marriage Gets Cheaper As Turkmenbashi Drops \$50,000 Foreigner’s Fee.” 10 June 2005. <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2005/06/c2984fe7-fbca-4bc1-98d3-d5d4b42bfded.html>

Divorce

Although divorce is rare in Turkmenistan, the constitution does guarantee the right of divorce to men and women. This is often not a realistic recourse for women simply because they are usually economically dependent on their husbands. A woman could theoretically allege spousal abuse on the part of her husband. However, she would do so only if she were well educated and had the means to support herself and her minor children. Two possible grounds for divorce initiated by a man would be infertility or infidelity on the part of the wife. In a divorce of this sort, the husband would retain custody of the children. Divorce proceedings brought by either partner are permissible under Islamic tradition and old Turkmen tribal law. There are no reliable judicial statistics on the number or nature of divorces in Turkmenistan.⁹⁸

Family Celebrations

In addition to marriages, births, and deaths, other rituals have grown up around life cycle events in Turkmenistan. Each festival is preceded by elaborate planning and preparation. The first such celebration is the *beshek* or wooden cradle ritual. A child is placed into a wooden cradle in the first days of life and spends its first year of life in the covered wooden ark, safe from the evil eye. The *sunnet* is the ceremony of circumcision for male children between the ages of five and seven. Girls who have been selected to be brides are honored in the *kelin* or bridal shower celebration. Later in life men and women who have reached the age of 63 are treated to a special birthday celebration. The number 63 is significant because it commemorates the longevity of the prophet Muhammad. All of these celebrations are the occasion for music, dance, festive costumes, and kitchen delicacies. Friends, relatives, neighbors, and visiting dignitaries are invited to join the festivities.⁹⁹



© Jonneke / flickr.com
Traditional wedding celebration

Status of the Elderly and Children

In Turkmenistan, as in other Central Asian countries, respect for elder persons in or outside the family is profound. Elder care facilities do exist in Turkmenistan, but Turkmen are conspicuously absent from them. It would be disgraceful for a Turkmen family to commit its elders to a nursing or elder home. Grandparents are considered integral family members and sources of wisdom and spirituality. Turkmen children are expected to show unconditional obedience to their parents who are presumed to know best. Unruly or disobedient children bring shame to the family.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ International Women's Rights Action Watch. "Country Reports: Turkmenistan. Prepared for the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women." May 2006.

<http://iwwraw.igc.org/publications/countries/turkmenistan.htm>

⁹⁹ Eurasia.net "National Minorities are Losing Their Cultural Identity" No date.

[http://www.eurasianet.org/turkmenistan.project/files2/040825cultural_identity\(eng\).doc](http://www.eurasianet.org/turkmenistan.project/files2/040825cultural_identity(eng).doc)

¹⁰⁰ Country Studies. Library of Congress. "Turkmenistan: Social Structure." 1996.

<http://countrystudies.us/turkmenistan/11.htm>

Naming Conventions

Children in Turkmenistan are usually named by the grandparents during the first week of life. Often a mullah or holy man is invited to say prayers after which he will recite the child's name three times into each ear along with the *fathiha* or opening chapter of the Quran. In accordance with Sunni Muslim practice, children can be named by selecting a first name that commemorates some Islamic hero or includes an amalgam of "abd" (servant



of) plus one of the 99 divine Quranic attributes, e.g., Abd-el-Jelil (Servant of the Exalted). A long list of Quranic and genteel names for girls exists as well. Children also carry their patronymic name (father's name) as a middle or second name. Family names remain unchanged and women take on their husband's surname. Occasionally, a child may be named according to its place in the family or to particular circumstances surrounding its birth. For example, a sickly child might be named Umid (hope) or a child born after previous miscarriages could be called Toxtajan (stop).¹⁰¹

Exchange 84: Are these your children?

Soldier:	Are these your children?	bular thiZing chaghalaringiZmi?
Local:	Yes.	howa

¹⁰¹ The Khiva Interactive Guidebook. "Beshiks and Babies."
<http://www.khiva.info/gb/festivals/lifecel/beshiks.htm>