



Influenced by Persian Thought

"Popular" Anatolian Islam A Mixture of Ancient Beliefs

At a certain point in history, the Turks found themselves surrounded by the Islamic conquests, and when the Islamic armies reached the lands of the Turks to spread the religion in 22 AH / 643 CE, their leader Shahr Baraz was only able, at that time, to request reconciliation and convey his willingness to participate in the wars of the Islamic army that were in close proximity to their regions, so reconciliation was concluded between them and there ceased to be conflict between the Turks and the Muslims; rather, everyone marched together in the conquests and in the spread of Islam.

When the Turks entered Islam, Sufism became an inherent and parallel aspect of their religiosity in terms of the tendency to excessively revere those who they considered to be the people of faith. At that time, Sufism in the Abbasid society was found in the corner of worship and asceticism—far from social mobility during the era of the Ottoman Empire. In Anatolia in particular, it has become a society and religion for them to follow, and—for the common folk—it has become their entrance to religion and the field of their practice of it.

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Ancient beliefs and their myths produced a perverse spin on Islam in Anatolia.”

When Sufism became a religious and ritual custom among the Turks, although it often differs from adherence to the laws of the Sharia, this caused Sufism to lead and deviate towards beliefs and myths that have nothing to do with Islam. This is due to the fact that some of the first Turks who responded to the call of Islam were not fully aware of its bases, and they did not form—before joining Islam—a full and correct understanding of the religion, its principles, and its origins. Moreover, due to the newness of their reversion to Islam, they lacked having a correct image of devotional rituals, and they lacked having full awareness of the truth of the pure and correct Islamic belief that relies mainly on the two most important sources of legislation, namely the Qu'ran and the authentic Sunnah of the Prophet (may the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), in addition to the fact that most of the early Turks embraced multiple disparate religions throughout their history in the various geographical locations they inhabited, whether they settled there or meandered from one area to another; this clearly impacted the formulation of their social and cultural customs and traditions, as well as the formation of their religious and spiritual customs and beliefs. Converting from one belief to another or from one religion to another is a common occurrence throughout Turkish history. Therefore, when a Turk converted to any different religion, it was to be expected that he would merge some of his old beliefs with the new ones. When the Turks reverted to Islam—especially the groups that migrated to Asia Minor—their religiosity was not without its impurities, oddities, and confusion. They still had some of the legacies of Pagan beliefs and their traditions that they carried, which became clear in how they practiced religion.

Ignorance of the core beliefs of Islam led many of the early Turks to distance themselves from the true Islamic faith and becoming reckless or negligent in its manifestation; this was also caused by their ignorance of the language of the Holy Qur'an, their geographical location being far away from the original centers of Islamic knowledge, and what they were subjected to at the hands of the Mongol invaders. It led them to fall under the influence of many Sufi orders, which are paths tainted with Pagan sediments and innovations within many of their rituals and practices. This may be the cause for cracking of the integrity of their beliefs, especially since they dealt with it with complete faith and without doubting that it is Islamic in origin.

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The Anatolians refused to leave their social standpoints and their cultural influences related to beliefs about nature.”

Thus, Sufism among the Turks took at its roots an esoteric approach, as did Islam when it entered among the Turks—specifically the Turks of Asia Minor— where it was contaminated among them by their set of beliefs that was derived from ancient backgrounds, both social and spiritual, which are mostly Pagan in origin mixed with other Asian beliefs. All evidence indicates that their form of Islam was influenced by ancient beliefs passed down from generation to generation of Turks, **such as Shamanism(1), Burhamia(2), and Manichaeism(3).** The remnants of these belief systems, along with the inherited cultural and religious impurities, remained engraved in the popular culture of the Turks after their reversion to Islam and left clear traces in the Islamic religious manifestations in them. Turkish Islam has been dyed with various dimensions relating to their ancient cultural practices and beliefs, and, therefore, it is permissible for us to say: Anatolian Islam has acquired a popular character rather than being rooted and established within the folds of the Sharia.

Shamanism

One of the beliefs rooted in Central Asia and Siberia, it is not considered a religion but rather a group of rituals and beliefs associated with a group of different and disparate religions, Shamanism revolves around concepts and ideas related to the flight of spirits, prophecies, and the treatment of diseases. Shamanism also emphasizes an important social principle, represented in the association with the clan or human groups that are bound by one unit, and this principle is compatible with the first social nature of the Turk and is linked to their cultural heritage.

Reference:
Inas Saadi and Usama Adnan, Russia's Religious History from Paganism to Christianity (D.M: Ashurbanipal bookstore, 2019).

Burhamia

Burhamia and its beliefs are represented in the teachings of the upper and priestly classes of the Hindu religion, and Burhamia is the highest class of Indian society, with its own rituals, prayers and remembrance. And it was one of the beliefs that influenced the Turk, like other religions and beliefs.

Reference:
Gustav Le Bon, The Civilization of India, translated by Adel Zuaier (Cairo: The Hindawi Foundation, 2014).

Manichaeism

Manichaeism emerged from the womb of Persian Magianism, attributed to Mani the Persian, who is said to have been born in 216 AD, and he claimed prophethood, and that the revelation came to him at an early age when he was 12 years old, and his ideas were a mixture between Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, Judaism and Christianity, and he tried to make for himself a holy book as the Gospel. Manichaeism was one of the earliest beliefs and ideas influenced by the Turk of Persian culture.

Reference:
Gustav Le Bon, The Civilization of India, translated by Adel Zuaier (Cairo: The Hindawi Foundation, 2014).

References:

- 1) Tawfiq Al-Tawil, Sufism in Egypt during the Ottoman Era (Egypt: Al-Etimad Press, 1946).
- 2) Hanan Al-Maabadi, Sufism and its Effects in Turkey during the Ottoman Era - Presentation and Criticism (PhD Thesis, Umm Al-Qura University, Makkah AL-Mukarramah, 1429 H).
- 3) Muhammad bin Jarir al-Tabari, History of Nations and Kings (Damascus: Dar Al-Fikr, 1979 AD).