



With Tambourine and Dancing

The Ottoman Dogmatism:

This who has no Sheikh to follow, his Sheikh will be “Satan”

Sufi sects grew up in Anatolia under the care of the Ottoman Sultanate, whose Sultans devoted themselves to support and approach the deviant Sheikhs of the Sufi Orders, when they used the mysticism of Sufism in their political schemes. For example: what has been revealed by historical documents of contacts between Abd Al-Hamid II and the groupings of the Sufi Orders and their Sheikhs in Turkestan, South Africa and China, and he succeeded in gathering these Orders, ignoring its doctrinal deviations, in order to achieve his political goals.

Sufi Orders multiplied, varied, and spread throughout Ottoman history, and their impact became officially evident under the patronage of the Sultans who were keen to harmonize with it. Accordingly, in terms of logic that permits the Turki (Khalil Inaljik) to describe the Sufi Orders in Anatolia as religious ways, and to divide them into two sections: the ways known by their Sufi Monasteries, such as the Naqshbandi, Mawlawi and Khulutiyya, which are supported by the endowments of the Sultanic institutions that belong to the Ottoman statesmen, and the other; represented in the esoteric methods that deliberately conceal their worship and rituals.


“Sufism” was the under the Sultanic will.... And the Sultans supported its mysticism.


Whoever traces the origins of Sufi Orders and the history of Anatolia, will find an overlap between them; in their rituals, supplications and connections, rather, he will even find their Sheikhs bask in an aura of reverence in more than one way, even the Shiite ways found supporters of Sufism to spread its call in Turkey; therefore, it is not surprising that we find Sheikh Safi al-Din al-Ardebili – the great grandfather of Shah Ismail al-Safavi, founder of the Safavid State in Iran – surrounded by a large number of followers as a result of the strong call or influential propaganda made by him and his followers of Sufis and Dervishes who were able to spread their call in some territories of the Ottoman Sultanate.

The Sufi Orders – with their differences, both apparent and mystic – contributed to the expansion of the influence of the Ottomans during the fourteenth century AD, especially in Anatolia. Therefore, it is natural to say: that any Turk in Anatolia during that era had a kind of connection with Sufism and its ramifications. Accordingly, the say of: “Those who have no Sheikh to follow, their Sheikh will be “Satan” had spread; thus, the founders of the Orders bask in a high position, reverence and respect among the Turks. They consider them holy due to their ability to enhance the religious affection of their followers, and what they claim in terms of approaching Allah through meditation and visions, and with activities and supplications, some of which are based on dancing; on the rhythm of drums and tambourines. Therefore, in the late Ottoman empire, Istanbul alone contained 20 Sufi Orders, and more than 300 Sufi Monasteries.

Most of the Sheikhs of the Sufi Orders were under the will of the rulers; therefore, the Ottoman Sultans encouraged Sufism among Turks, especially the troops, in order to arm them and make use of them in their protection; thus enhancing their authority, therefore, the Sufi Orders had an official support and attention to Al-Arbetah, Monasteries and Corners in their buildings and facilities. Although, Sufism is a religious form that aroused away from the political practices, and focused on the foundations of social concepts and traditional ways of life, but it was mired in a swamp of myths and falsehoods, and far from the foundations and rules of jurisprudence. Nevertheless, the Ottomans succeeded in rapprochement with them politically and seeking their support at the popular level.

Apart from the Sunni Ottomans – before them the Anatolian Seljuks-, generally, the environment of Asia Minor; was an incubator for large number of philosophical ideas, with its theories coming from different cultures. In the forefront of which is the sacerdotalism status that these cultures brought to Turkish Islam, as the Turks could not emancipate from it, so the Englishman Bernard Lewis (died: 1439 AH / 2018 AD) says about the Sufi Orders of the Turks: “These methods added much of what was lacking in Salafi Islam, and filled the void left by Salafism between the man and his creator. Dervish guides performed the task of religious men and spiritual guides, and their meetings opened the way to fraternity. For the sake of searching for Allah and, on some occasions, the struggle for human needs. Their doctrine was alive, mystical, stemming from natural intuition, and their worship was full of emotion and conscience, using music and dancing, and that was to help the believer to contact with Allah.”

According to Lewis’s concept, true Islam that rejects superstition and sacerdotalism is considered deficient from his point of view, thus the dervishes covered this priestly deficiency, which he believes is important to nourish the spiritual side, and the bearers of these extraneous ideas found an entrance for them to broadcast their philosophies and prophecies related to several aspects, primarily: the political side serving and subject to the authority, on the pretext that they are mediators between the Creator and his creation. All of this took place under the auspices and blessings of the Sunni Ottoman Empire, although Lewis had deliberately interpreted it according to his Western concept and vision, but it was a factual reality if compared to historical sources that described this aspect of the intellectual life of the Ottoman state and its Turkish society.


The Ottoman “dervish” believed that it came to complete the spiritual aspect of Islam.




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