

Islam and the Turks

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The Religion of the Turks

The ancient Türks worshipped the elements of nature and believed that they had been created by the Sky God. They called this creator Tengri, and offered to him animal sacrifices, mostly horses, cows and sheep as befitted semi-nomadic pastoralists. Tengri-cult was widespread among the Turkic peoples of Inner Asia, and traces of its religious traditions lived long after they had left their old homeland and moved to the Central Asian and the Pontic steppes and later to the Middle East. The Türk religious system also accommodated Shamanistic practices and the cults of lesser deities, among them a female deity of protection and fertility. Living in mountainous regions, ancient Türks gave due respect to the mountains and regarded them as sacred. Türk ancestor worship required that the qagan himself lead an annual procession of the nobles bearing sacrifices to the ancestral caves.

In the course of their history and migrations, the Turkic peoples came into contact with several other religions. Mazdaism and Zurvanism had a following in the Türk Qaganate, while Buddhism won the favour of numerous rulers, including the great Bilge Qagan of the Second Qaganate. The Uygurs, under Soghdian influence, officially converted to Manichaeism in the mid-eighth century, while the Khazar State was ruled by an aristocracy that professed Judaism. It was this heterogeneous heritage upon which Islam was gradually superimposed from the eighth century.

The Conversion of the Turks to Islam

The Turks first encountered Islam as the religion of a conqueror who slowly moved in on traditionally Turk-controlled regions and threatened Turk economic and political interests. Considering that the Turkic peoples had always been open to religious influences of foreign origin, their initial resistance in the face of the Muslim conquest may be regarded as serving the defence of their sources of revenue rather than that of their freedom of faith. The territory of the Western Türk Qaganate stretched from the Eastern Karatau Mountains to Jungaria, and Central Asia's Iranian oasis city-states were also within its sphere of influence. It was there that Türk authority was first challenged by the advancing forces of Islam towards the end of the seventh century. During the first decade of the eighth century, Umayyad Commander Qutayba ibn Muslim forces consolidated Islamic rule in lower Tukháristán and conquered most of Soghdiana. By 715 the Turkic and Soghdian peoples of Central Asia had been forced to submit to Umayyad authority, and Transoxania came under Muslim rule. The Khazars were compelled to move their capital to Etil on the lower Volga in order to distance themselves from Muslim authority. Long-term resistance to Islam, however, was not possible, and the Khazar qagan converted to Islam for the first time in 737. Even though this opportunistic conversion did not last, by the late tenth century Khazaria had been permanently drawn into the Muslim sphere of influence and duly Islamised. Following the conversion of the Iranian peoples, Arabo-Iranian forces conducted joint expeditions into Turk territories and carried off large numbers of Turkic tribesmen to use them as slave soldiers in the Muslim armies. These slave soldiers (ghuláms or mamlúks) eventually rose to high positions in the Muslim military hierarchy, and some of them founded their own ruling dynasties, such as the Túlúnid (868-905) and Ikhshídíd (935-969) dynasties in Egypt, the Ghaznavids of Afghanistan and Punjab (962-1186), and the Mamlúks of Egypt and Syria (1250-1517).

Islamic Jihád and the Turks

Prophet Muhammad made the Holy War (jihád) a religious duty of Muslims. It was conducted in order to spread Islam among the peoples of the earth. The world was divided into two main parts: Dár al-Islám (the House of Islam), the lands already inhabited by Muslims) and Dár al-Harb (the House of War) to which Islam was to be brought by the force of the sword, that is, lands to be conquered by the Muslim armies. The expectation was that Dár al-Harb would gradually diminish, and Dár al-Islám would eventually cover the entire surface of earth. Prophet Muhammad prescribed different treatments for the followers of the three religions of Judaism, Christianity, and Zoroastrianism and those of all other religions. The followers of the above three religions were regarded as "the people of the Book" (Ahl al-Kitáb), that is, recipients of God's written revelations that they had, however, misinterpreted or deliberately ignored and strayed from the right path. Such peoples were allowed to keep their religion and practise it relatively freely if they were willing to acknowledge the supremacy of Islam and pay a tax (jizya) to the Muslim treasury. These peoples were largely left to live in peace. The adherents of other religions were regarded as heathens and were to be converted to Islam by force. From pagans nothing was to be accepted, not even tax, but full submission to Islam. Their other choice was the sword, that is, death. Before attacking such people, however, Muslims first should, according to the instructions of the Prophet, call them to Islam and try to convert them to the true faith. If they heeded the call and became Muslims, they became members of the Muslim community, paid the "alms tax" prescribed for Muslims (zakát, less in amount than the tax paid by the conquered Peoples of the Book), and went on to fight side by side with other Muslims to expand the boundaries of Dár al-Islám even further. This is what happened to the Turkic peoples who lived in Muslim-conquered territories.

A special term, Türkmen (Arabic Turkumán), was used to denote Islamicised Turkic peoples, mainly of the Oguz tribal confederation. They joined the Arabo-Iranian Muslim forces and turned against their fellow Turks who persisted in their pagan beliefs and were reluctant to submit to the sovereignty of the Caliphate. Those Turks who were captured during the Muslim campaigns were often carried off to be incorporated into the Muslim armies as slave soldiers. Türkmen tribesmen were responsible for the

Turcification of Anatolia even before Seljukid rule was established there. In the course of the eleventh century some 500,000 Oguz Türkmen moved into the area, and by the time of the Mongol conquest their numbers had doubled. It was them who, alongside the local Greek and Armenian Christians, formed the population of the Anatolian beyliks, the Seljukid realm of Rûm, and later Ottoman Anatolia.

For the Turks, there were definite political and economic advantages in converting to Islam. It is true that, as Muslims, they all came under the command of the Caliph, and in that sense they lost their independence. But the only alternative was fighting. Choosing this option, the various Turkic tribes and loosely organised tribal confederations would have had to enter a never-ending series of battles with the numerically vastly superior, militarily stronger and much better organised Caliphal army. Furthermore, the members of the Muslim forces believed in their mission of spreading the only true religion which greatly strengthened their morale. From a military point of view the Turks did not have a chance and they knew it. They could, however, turn the inevitable to their own advantage. When they converted to Islam, they became part of the advancing Muslim forces, themselves conquerors instead of conquered. They shared both the honour and the economic benefits derived from participating in the continuous Muslim war of conquest.

Islam and the Ghází Movement of the Frontiers

The tribal warriors who moved into Anatolia during and after the eleventh century gathered under the banners of military leaders called gházís. The term comes from the Arabic verb ghazá, 'to carry out a military expedition or raid', and the noun ghází, derived from this verb, means 'raider, war lord, conqueror'. Under the leadership of these commanders the tribesmen settled near the existing frontiers between Muslim-inhabited and non-Muslim areas, and pursued a military lifestyle. This arrangement offered numerous benefits for the tribesmen. Firstly, they lived on the frontiers, as far as possible from any central authority. It was important for the tribesmen to maintain relative independence from the Caliph, the Seljukid ruler, and later the Ottoman court. Having lived in loosely organised tribal confederations, they had never had the need before to accept the restrictions imposed by a strong central government. Secondly, they had all justification needed to march against the settlements of the Unbelievers, as non-Muslims were called, living beyond the borders. These attacks were no longer those of predatory raiders but those of holy warriors bringing Islam to the heathens. On an individual level, of course, the Muslim soldiers benefited from the three-day free looting allowed by Islamic law for the members of the victorious Muslim army in any conquered settlement. Further they earned considerable prestige in a society where valour was greatly respected, and received land grants from their grateful overlords. Turkish fighters thus became instrumental in conquering new territories for Islam. Their new role was reflected in the Arabic names given to their leaders, for example Husám al-Dawla (Sword of the State) or Sayf al-Dawla (Sabre of the State), as opposed to the names borne by Iranian civil dignitaries, such as Nizám al-Mulk (Order of the Kingdom), ʿAmíd al-Mulk (Pillar of the Kingdom), and the like. It was only during the later Seljuk era that the Turks carved out a place for themselves in the administration of the state.

The Turks' constant push for conquest along the frontiers brought numerous benefits to the state. The conquests brought new agricultural lands under state control. These were essential to support the growing population, and could also be distributed among outstanding ghází leaders as remuneration of their efforts, thus providing incentive for further conquests. Taxes paid by the subjugated populations of the new territories increased the state revenues, which enabled the ruler to strengthen his grip on his realm. Control of large sections of east-west trade routes running through Anatolia to Byzantium and the Mediterranean had a beneficial effect on trade, and lively commercial centres popped up in towns like Konya (the Seljuk capital), Bursa, Ankara and Kayseri.

Conquests were also a necessity for the survival of all Turkish states that ever existed in Anatolia. The beyliks as well as the Seljuk realm, and later the Ottoman Empire, were surrounded by potential or actual enemies. It was a matter of self-defence to attack and conquer these adversaries before they could cause irreparable damage to the Turkish Muslim state. In this situation the Turks, when they defended themselves, also acted as defenders of the cause of Islam. In this capacity they became the single most powerful Defenders of the Faith in the Muslim world after the Mongol conquest, supplanting the Arabs among whom Islam had been born and brought to flourish, and retained this position until the First World War.

The Turks and Sunní Islam

In Islam there are two principal branches, Sunnism and Shí'ism, which differ on a variety of matters. Chief among these differences are questions of succession, authority and law. The Sunnís regard the caliph as the head of the community of the believers, responsible for the administration of justice on the basis of the Shari'ca (Islamic law), and the defence of Islam and its realm. The caliph is either chosen for his office by the community or is nominated for it by his predecessor. In any case, he must be a person deserving, and worthy of, the position of the leader of the Muslim community. Shí'ís, on the other hand, believe that the imám, as they call the leader of the community, is a divinely appointed ruler who succeeds to the prerogatives of the Prophet. The imáms are believed to have superhuman qualities that they inherited from Adam through Muhammad, their shared ancestor.

The Turkish adherence to the Sunní, rather than to the Shí'í, creed was partly due to geography. The ʿAbbásid overlords of the Turks, from whom the Ottoman Beyazit I received in 1395 his mandate to rule Anatolia, were Sunní Muslims of the Hanafí¹ school. Had the Turks come under stronger Iranian influence, they may have followed the teachings of one of the Shí'í sects there.

The Hanafí doctrines professed by the ʿAbbásids were particularly suited to Turkish society for a variety of reasons. A feature of paramount importance was the Hanafí school's view of the acceptable sources of Islamic law. Apart from the Qur'án and the Prophetic Tradition (hadíth), the Hanafís also allowed ijma'c, the consensus of the opinion of the Muslim community (in the wider sense) or the scholars of religious law (in the narrower sense). The admittance of ijma'c among the sources of law meant that Islamic law could be bent and adjusted (even if only to a limited degree) to suit the needs of peoples of non-Arabic background better, and to provide for social and political circumstances that arose far away, both in time and in distance, from the Prophet's early seventh-century Arabian tribal society.

Among the people, Hanafí views were well-received because they reflected some characteristics of traditional Turkish society. For example, in Turkish tribal societies women enjoyed a better position and more rights than their counterparts among the Arabs. Therefore, Turks found Hanafí laws of inheritance, giving women more rights than other legal schools, naturally appealing. Furthermore, the Hanafí school treated offences against certain prohibitions of the Shari'ca, such as wine-drinking, with more tolerance than any other school, which made it rather popular among new converts.

Seljuk and, to an even greater degree, Ottoman authority rested on a highly centralised state organisation. In this state central authority replaced authority and loyalties based on blood ties and tribal affiliations. For this reason the Ottomans found that Hanafí doctrine and Hanafí legislation that did not attribute great importance to blood relationships (as is apparent in the Hanafí laws of inheritance, for example) were highly suited to their needs.

Islam and the Turkish State

The ʿAbbásid Caliphate, direct successor of the Umayyad State and the first four, so-called Rightly Guided, Orthodox Caliphs who had been managing the affairs of the Muslim community since the Prophet's death in 632, was practically destroyed by the Mongol invasion and the conquest of its capital, Baghdad, in 1258. Even though the ʿAbbásid caliphs ruled in name from their Egyptian exile, their days of power were over. There was, therefore an apparent need for a Muslim ruler who could take upon himself the duties of the true head of the Islamic state. This role was claimed by the Ottoman sultan, and fulfilled by him until the abolition of the Caliphate in 1924.

At the same time, the Turkic peoples played a very significant role in the collapse of the Arab caliphate, whose political and religious inheritance they later claimed. First of all, Turk tribesmen formed the majority of the population in the Mongol empire where the Mongols themselves were but a minority, albeit an élite one. This phenomenon was the result of the Mongol policy of incorporating nomadic or semi-nomadic tribesmen of conquered regions into the Mongol army. As large Mongol-conquered areas were inhabited by Turks, more and more Turk fighting units were deployed in the Mongol campaigns. By the time the Golden Horde reached Russia, Poland and Hungary, the Turkic element was so strong that the Mongol invaders were called Tatars, the name of one of their Turkic units. Some Turkic groups played a role even more important than that of the warriors. Chief among them are the Uygurs who lent their writing system to the Mongols and provided advisers to Mongol rulers, including Chinghis Khan himself. In this context it can be established that some Turkic elements actively participated in destroying the Arab caliphate and created a kind of void in the Muslim world. By doing so they made it possible for other, Islamised, Turks to take over the political and religious leadership from the Arabs and recreate the Islamic empire with its new centre, Istanbul.

Some Muslim scholars believed that the Turks attained universal supremacy as a result of God's growing concern about the state of Islam and the Muslims in the hands of the Arabs. During the ʿAbbásid era the Muslim Caliphate started down the road of political decline, became militarily weak, and was no longer able to defend the lands of Islam from non-Muslim invaders (such as the Mongols). Therefore God, ever wise and benevolent, took the reins out of the hands of the Arabs and appointed another people, the Turks, as the new custodians of Muslim traditions and the saviours of Islam. His choice was believed to have been based on the qualities of the semi-nomadic Turkic tribesmen who, unspoilt and virtuous, were not altogether unlike the Arabs who had first been chosen to receive the Prophet of Islam, Muhammad. The Turks went on to restore the unity of the Muslims, to revive the power of Islam, and to restore to the Muslim state its lost dignity and glory.²

When the Ottoman Turks conquered Constantinople in 1453 they became even more ardent in their desire to wipe out infidelity in the world and to carry the cause of Islam to universal victory. Mehmet II the Conqueror (1444-1446 & 1451-1481) saw himself as the inheritor of the Roman and Byzantine imperial tradition as well as the natural successor of the Arab Muslim caliphs and through them that of Prophet Muhammad. It was these imperial ambitions, fuelled by religious fervour, that drove Mehmet II and his successors to wage a holy war against Europe and other lands inhabited by disbelievers. As a result, the Ottoman Empire, apart from conquering the Balkans and Central Europe, expanded eastwards, where it subsumed the Arab provinces of the Middle East, and swept down to the south to conquer North Africa and the holy places of Arabia. Damascus, the former Umayyad capital, Cairo, the cultural centre of Islam, and Mecca and Medina, which cradled Islam in its early days, all came under Ottoman rule. It was then that the Sultan assumed the titles of 'Servitor of the Two Holy Sanctuaries' and 'Defender of the Sharíʿa'.

When the Turks took over the leadership in the Islamic state, they changed both the form and the functions of government as had been known in the days of the Caliphate. They reinforced the government's political power and the state became more stable and more enduring. Dynasties no longer came and went within the span of one century as had often happened before. A strong, centralised

government became the distinguishing feature of the Ottoman Sultanate. The power of the state rested on well-established and well-organised institutions which were far better defined than those of the Arab Caliphate. Distinctive social classes appeared, the army, the bureaucracy, the men of religion and the judiciary all had their well-circumscribed powers and functions, as well as a clear system of regular recruitment and rules of promotion. Probably also building on what they had learnt over the centuries through contact with Chinese, Mongol, Byzantine and other governments, the Turks greatly improved the organisation of the Islamic state.

Islam was the traditional basis of the Ottoman state. In this Muslim community that constituted the state, it was Islam that created the framework of authority and provided the principle of political and social cohesion, and inspired loyalty in the subjects. The polity was seen as the Community of the Muslims, and its head was dedicated to the maintenance of the Islamic faith and to the extension of its realm. From a religious point of view, the sultan was the executor of the Sharīʿa (Islamic law), and his authority as head of state derived from this fact. In the Islamic theory of government, he was answerable to Islamic law, while his subjects were responsible to him. Any government was regarded legitimate only if and when it recognised the sovereignty of the Sharīʿa and respected the basic rights of the Muslim community guaranteed by it. Ottoman Turkey itself was conceived of as the leader and defender of all Muslims. It was, therefore, responsible for a greater Islamic unity that extended beyond the Turk-inhabited regions. In this realm all Muslims were equal, at least theoretically, irrespective of their origins. In the interest of preserving unity, the government dominated the state not only through precise organisation but also through force and through the control of people's minds.

The newly established educational institutions and the Muslim scholars working in them inevitably brought the fruits of high Islamic culture into the midst of hitherto uneducated, mostly illiterate Turks. The first Ottoman medrese (school) set up in Iznik in 1331 was to be followed by hundreds of others throughout the empire. Here Turkish students of all backgrounds were familiarised with the Arabic language, the language of the Qur'án, and through it not only with the Islamic religious sciences but also the treasures of Greek and Persian philosophy, theoretical rational sciences (such as mathematics and natural sciences), practical rational sciences (such as ethics and political science), and many others.

The Role of the Turks in Spreading Islamic Culture

Turkish conquest was always closely followed by building an Islamic infrastructure in the new lands. This measure was meant to facilitate the introduction of Islamic culture into the area and the Islamisation of the local population. This point is best illustrated by the account of the conquest of Trebizond in 1461, by Dervish Ahmad Āshiqpashazáda, himself a jihád fighter as well as a dervish. Āshiqpashazáda reports in his Histories of the Family of Osman: "As the Padisháh [i.e. the Sultan] always put in order every stronghold, so too he did in Trebizond. Inside it, mosques and medreses were set up, and Muslim families were brought in. The houses of the unbelievers which stood empty were given to the Muslims as their property, and the citadel was strongly fortified."³ The conquered town was settled with Muslims to create an instant Muslim community who would then serve as examples and spread the religion among the surviving non-Muslim inhabitants. The same practice was followed in the Balkans, where whole Turkic tribes were, sometimes forcibly, brought in and settled in order to inflate the Muslim population. The new settlers would participate in the task of spreading Islam ever more fervently in their gratitude for the material rewards they had received as their share from the benefits of the Islamic conquest. Their presence and activities helped to stabilise the region and, at the same time, secured the availability of strong and loyal defence forces to ward off any enemy attacks.

Newly conquered cities were usually rebuilt immediately. This was also the case after the conquest of Constantinople (1453). As was customary in Muslim cities, each neighbourhood centred around an

important religious institution and its attendant facilities. It was important for the conqueror to set up infrastructure of Islam as soon as possible. Between 1453 and 1481, 209 mosques, 24 Islamic educational institutions and 32 baths were built in Istanbul, as opposed to only 12 bazaars. This shows that religious infrastructure was even more important than trade. Through its institutions, Islam was advertised and spread among the inhabitants of the city. Even non-Muslims were compelled to see the minarets stretching toward the sky, symbolising the greatness of Islam and the irresistible power of the sultan. The mosques served as regular meeting places for Muslims. There, surrounded by their fellow Muslims, their sense of belonging to the community grew in strength, as did their commitment to the cause of spreading Islam, and their support for the sultan who championed that cause. This shared feeling of religious mission made Muslim Turkey ever stronger. In the schools, students learnt the Qur'án, studied the Prophetic traditions and other religious disciplines only to rise to prestigious posts in society in the ranks of the state administration or the religious élite. Many students received scholarships from the state or from pious endowments that made Islamic education accessible to children of all backgrounds.

Numerous professional guilds were set up to coordinate the activities of their members and arbitrate disputes amongst them. Members of these organisations usually belonged to the same religion (mostly Islam) as well as to the same profession. The guilds thus served as religious confraternities that strengthened religious feeling and religious discipline among their members. They held common prayers, went on pilgrimages together, and organised lectures on Islamic values and ethics. The Muslim conquerors recognised that people were more profoundly subdued if not only their bodies and their possessions were conquered but also their minds. Furthermore, as the sultan ruled by divine mandate, being an obedient and dutiful Muslim also meant to be a humble and dutiful subject of the sultan. In this way the population's submission to Islam minimised the likelihood of uprisings and rebellions against the government, and left the ruler and the military forces free to pursue further conquests.

At the later stages of Ottoman conquests the policy of Islamisation was not carried through with the original zeal. This omission may have played a crucial role in the eventual collapse of the Ottoman Empire. In the Balkans, Transylvania and Hungary large Christian populations came under Muslim rule, yet they were not assimilated to Islam and to the Ottomans in the way the originally Christian inhabitants of Anatolia had been. One reason for this may have been that the Turcification of the European dominions was not completed as these lands were never settled by so many Turks as Anatolia. Secondly, Ottoman policy towards the Christian churches in these regions was rather tolerant. Probably for economic reasons, that is to secure higher tax revenues, and perhaps also to pacify the local population and make it more manageable, local churches and leaders were granted substantial concessions. In the Balkans, the Orthodox Church was confirmed in its jurisdiction and properties, reorganised, and allowed to continue its activities among the Christian communities.

Even though there undoubtedly were forced conversions, it was not generally obligatory to convert to Islam. According to the census of 1520-1530, ca 81% of the Balkan population were Christians, while only about 19% were Muslims and many of the latter were new Muslim settlers coming from other parts of the Ottoman Empire. Muslims were concentrated in towns, while most of the rural population remained unconverted. In Sofia, for instance, 66.4%, in Edirne 82% of the inhabitants were Muslims. The new converts brought some of their Christian practices into Islam, and this heritage helped to form a unique, Turk-facilitated form of Islam, that might be called Balkan Folk Islam. In this system baptism, the worship of Christian saints, the celebration of Easter and belief in the healing powers of Christian churches lived side by side with the teachings of Islam.

The Súfí Influence on Turkish Islam

Súfís were Muslim mystics who saw themselves as seekers of divine reality whose goal was to acquire

knowledge of, and to unite with, the divine. This idea was elaborated by Abú al-Hasan ʿAlí al-Hujwírí in his "Uncovering of the Veiled", written in the eleventh century:

"The principle and foundation of Sufism and knowledge of God rests on saintship (wiláya), the reality of which is unanimously affirmed by the Shaykhs ... God may confer on one a 'friendship' (wiláya) ... that empowers him to loose and bind and makes his prayers answered and his aspirations effectual."⁴

The first Súfís came to Anatolia from Iran and Turkestan. The Súfí babas, as they were called, accompanied small bands of Türkmen warriors and participated in their campaigns against the non-Muslim populations of the region. Súfís marched with the Seljuk armies and, fleeing from the Mongol invasion, found refuge in the court of the Seljuk rulers. Not only Konya, the Seljuk capital, but also Aksaray, Kayseri, Sivas and other cities soon became centres of Islamic mystical thought. At the same time, the influence of the great mystical theorist Ibn al-cArabí steadily grew in Turkish intellectual circles. His popularity was such that when he visited the Seljuk lands he was received with great honours by the sultan himself. Ottoman Islam, too, was marked by mystic overtones particularly suited to the militant fervour of the Islamic frontier. The political significance of Sufism is attested to by the fact that Osman, the founder of the dynasty, married the daughter of a Súfí dervish, Shaykh Ede Bali. Throughout his reign and in all his military campaigns he received the strongest religious backing the Súfís were able to provide. A legend, seeking to underpin the Ottomans' divine right to conquer and rule, says that the holy Shaykh Ede Bali himself girded Osman with a ghází sword and predicted that his descendants would rule the world. Thus Osman received his regalia, the symbols of his power, from the hands of a holy man. As holy men were regarded as 'friends of God', able to mediate between Him and men, their support for a ruler was in a sense perceived as God's approval of that person. This, of course, made the individual in question a popular leader under whose leadership the land would flourish, people would prosper, and the army would gain victory after victory.

When the Muslim forces embarked on campaigns against the infidels, the Súfís marched with them and encouraged them throughout the venture. Their presence boosted the troops' morale immensely. Not only were they fighting for the right cause but they were also assured of divine aid through the presence of the holy men. The Súfís also prepared amulets and talismans designed to protect their wearers against a variety of weapons and to avert any harm that might come to them. Simple-minded soldiers often ran bravely into their deaths believing that they were invulnerable to swords or bullets in their Súfí-prepared magic shirts. The Súfís often selected verses of the Qur'án containing words referring to divine protection and victory and copied these on pieces of paper that were then folded up and placed with small leather holders hanging about the necks of the warriors. Their resulting courage and firm belief in the ultimate victory, of course, did have a positive effect on their ability to fight, and more often than not they left the battlefield as victors. Their part in the conquest of Constantinople was commemorated by Khoja Sacd al-Dín (1599) who writes in "The Crown of Histories" that "legions of the dervishes were the advance guards of the troops, still from among the possessors of Hidden Power and the Lords of Visible Signs ... to implore the aid of the Giver of all gifts."⁵ It can be safely suggested that Súfí dervishes did play a considerable role in the Turkish-Muslim conquests both inside and outside Anatolia, and their presence actually improved the fighting power of the sultans' armies.

One of the great Súfí masters whose influence proved enduring in Turkey was Mawláná ("Our Master") Jalál al-Dín Rúmí⁶ (1207-1273). He united the traditions of dervishes previously active among the Turks, and created his own tariqa (path) with its major centre in Konya. The order became known as the Mevlevi path, a term derived from the founder's title. In his greatest work, the "Mathnawí", Rúmí strove to make God accessible and approachable to ordinary Muslims. In official Islam man is regarded as a "slave" of God, the Master, whose will determines man's fate. Man's role is only to worship, obey, and fulfil God's will. Fundamentalist religious scholars (ʿulamá') denied that it could be possible for man to know God, or

even to love God, simply by the nature of his limitations as God's creature. As opposed to the official view, Jalál al-Dín Rúmí explains that man could become a 'friend' (waliyy) of God. The basic principle of Sufism is this assumption, upon which then man should act in order to effect this friendship. It is in the ways of how to do it that Súfí paths differ from one another. Rúmí himself believed that music and dance inspired enthusiasm and facilitated ecstasy. The Mevlevi ritual dance (semâ) imitated the movement of celestial bodies and earned the name of 'whirling dervishes' for its performers.

As the Mevlevis regarded the arts as the tools of mysticism they patronised them generously. Mevlevi centres (tekkes) located in large cities soon became significant cultural institutions and art academies. By the eighteenth century Mevlevis had earned secure places among the best Ottoman poets and musicians. The order attracted many adherents from the Ottoman ruling classes, and it was their right to gird the sultan, in the true tradition of Ede Bali and Osman, with a holy sword at his accession to the throne.

Another popular Súfí taríqa, the Bektashi order, was founded by Hajji Bektash (ca 1297), a holy man who was the contemporary of the early Ottomans. Evliya Çelebi (1684), the famous Bektashi traveller and writer, gives an account of Hajji Bektash's life. The holy man spent forty years in prayers and during this period he achieved such a degree of sanctity that "in his sleep, his soul migrated into the world of spirits, and he became filled with the mystic science of spirits, and divine knowledge".⁷ After this time, he performed miracle after miracle, as proof of his sanctity. During his paramilitary career Hajji Bektash instituted a new militia, by converting Tatar communities and arranging for them to receive land grants in return for military service. His seven hundred disciples eventually established themselves in the towns conquered by Sultan Orhan (1326-1362). Then, according to legend, one of his followers, Sarı Saltık, went to the Eastern European lands of Dobruja, Moldavia, Poland and Russia, where he became the first missionary to preach the Islamic faith.

The Bektashi order was a syncretistic taríqa. They spread folk-Sufism among the population of the frontiers and the Shamanist tribes of Central Asia. In his teaching Hajji Bektash developed a synthesis of Sunní and Shi'í tenets, as well as Muslim and Christian religious practices. His followers venerated the imáms of the Twelve Shi'ites⁸ (in the Sunní Muslim Ottoman Empire) and, as a reminder of their affiliation, they wore a turban of twelve folds. Ja'far, the sixth imám, was chosen as the order's patron saint. From the Christians they adopted the practices of confirmation, communion and confession, all alien to Islam, introduced celibacy to the clergy, and developed a trinitarian theology in which God, 'Alí⁹ and Muhammad formed a kind of Holy Trinity. During initiation ceremonies, bread and wine (strictly forbidden by Islamic law) were offered after the Christian fashion.

Hajji Bektash's teachings had a particular appeal to people about to convert to Islam and Bektashi Súfís played a very important role in the conversion of the inhabitants of Anatolia and later the Balkans. The attraction did not lie solely in similarities between certain Christian teachings and practices and those of Hajji Bektash. Even though familiar elements did encourage people to approach Islam with an open heart, there were other points that increased the attraction greatly. One of these was the teaching that a believer could actually be one with God, and that the real goal of faith was to recognise this. Apart from the spiritual appeal, Bektashi practices seemed more liberal, and thus more tolerable, to new converts. For example, women were not segregated, as was customary in strict Muslim societies, but were allowed to appear in public unveiled. They were also welcome to participate fully in Bektashi rites, whereas in the mosques of official Islam they were relegated to the rows behind the men, so as not to distract the latter from their prayers. Furthermore, in spite of official Islam's reserved attitude toward poetry, the Bektashis cultivated mystical poetry which captivated the hearts of many. Ultimately, Bektashi dervishes brought into the fold of Islam large numbers of new converts because, through their teachings and practices, they absorbed the fears and directed the aspirations of ordinary people. They made Islam more approachable, brought God closer to men, took the strict Islamic laws less seriously than the official line, and made the

change brought about by the conversion less formidable, and therefore easier for all. In spite of all their small transgressions and the differences between their teachings and official Islam, Bektashi services to the cause of Islam must not be underestimated.

By the late fifteenth century the Bektashis had gained immense influence in the imperial court. They were the chaplains and advisers of the *Yeniçeri*¹⁰, the sultan's slave soldiers who formed his élite troops and many of whose officers rose to high positions in the Ottoman state. Through them, the Bektashis became extremely influential and were interfering with the business of the government. The sultan was eventually forced to curb their influence. The Bektashis, along with other *Súfí* orders, were brought under state control by means of permanent endowments and gifts for charitable purposes. Through these the government obtained the right to control *Súfí* orders and limit their activities.

The End of Turkish Leadership in the Muslim World

At the end of the pre-modern era Ottoman Turkey still represented an Islamic society built upon a strong state regime that exercised control over parochial communities, and a well-organised and subordinate religious establishment. However, during the transition from eighteenth-century Islamic imperial societies to modern national states the dissolution of the Ottoman empire could not be avoided. The Ottoman Empire, old-fashioned in many ways, could no longer withstand European political and economic pressure, and was no match for the vastly superior western military forces. When Turkey lost its suzerainty over the Balkans, the Arab Middle East, Egypt and North Africa, its image as the leading Islamic state could not be sustained. Its prestige was further damaged by the fact that it had been unable to defend the lands of Islam from Western non-Muslim expansion and lost its territories to European colonialists. In a speech renouncing the old-style military empire, Kemal Atatürk, head of the newly established Turkish republic, explained, "My friends, those who conquer by the sword are doomed to be overcome by those who conquer with the plough, and finally to give place to them. That is what happened to the Ottoman Empire."¹¹

Endnotes

1. The school of Kúfa, called Hanafí after its founder, Abú Hanífa (767).
2. This theory was beautifully set out by the great North African historian, Ibn Khaldún. Lewis, p. 203.
3. Williams, p. 296.
4. Williams, p. 321.
5. Williams, p. 291.
6. In modern Turkish script: Mevlânâ Celalüddin Rûmî.
7. Williams, p. 344.
8. They acknowledge twelve principal imáms, or religious leaders, after the death of Prophet Muhammad. They form the majority branch of the Shí'ites.
9. Muhammad's nephew, son-in-law, and the fourth caliph after his death.
10. "New Army", called "Janissary" in western languages.
11. Lewis, p. 227.

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