The Acceptance of Islam by the Turks and The Spread of Shi-ism Among Them

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ABSTRACT

Before the emergence of Islam, several religions were prevalent among the Turks. By the first relationship between the Turks and Muslims was established by the Muslim conquest of Persia. Due to inappropriate policies, spread of Islam among Turks during Umayyad age was seen with a very slow progress. Not being in favor of the Omavids, the Alavids who wanted to attract supporters carried on their activities among the Turks. To achieve their aims, the Alavids combined the former religious teachings of the Turks with those of Islam, created a new religion and presented it to them. The Abbasids took advantage of the Turks and non-Arabs’ dissatisfaction and with their assistance disqualified the Omavids from power in a revolt. During the Abbasids’ Khalifate, the process of Islamisation of the Turks rapidly spread and all of them accepted Islam and were employed by the government. In the meantime, the Alavi beliefs also spread among the Turks. The Turks living in cities mostly accepted the Sunni-Islam and the nomad Turks, influenced by Bateni – shi-ite activities, and accepted Shiism.

INTRODUCTION

Shamanism has been religious belief of most of Turks in Transoxiana. Sufi sheikhs and Alavi missionaries (da'is) who used to go Transoxiana for the purpose of promotion of religion played a major role in Islamisation of the region. Turks at big cities of Transoxiana were more influenced of Iranian-Islamic culture, yet Turkmen nomads maintained most of their shi-ite– Alavi beliefs by acceptance of Islam. Overview of religious beliefs of Turks before Islam helps for our recognition from their social and religious struggles in the acceptance of Islam. Further, recognition of the similarity between religious beliefs of Turks before Islam with the Islamic beliefs especially Bateni Shia beliefs is important in our understanding from the effect of these similarities in the process of Islamisation of Turks. For a better understanding of this issue, firstly we consider investigation of religious beliefs of Turks and also spread of Shia beliefs among Turks as well as other activities involved in Islamisation of Turks. This study attempts to assess and analyze scientific and systematic form of Islam taking the Turks and the spread of Shiism among them. The author of this study sought to answer the following two questions: The first question: What were the ups and downs of the different periods of Islamic rule in the Muslim Turks? Second question: In what way and how the Turks were familiar with the Shia? The answers to these questions, two hypotheses have been proposed: First hypothesis: Due to their inappropriate policies, when the Omavids were in power, the Islamic belief made a very slow progress among the Turks but Abbasids hired Turks in their own state For appropriate policy The second hypothesis: the nomad Turks, influenced by the Alavid missionaries, No official Islam(Sunni) but converted to Shiite Islam acquainted. The time scope of the present study is the early centuries of Islam (During the rule of the Umayyads and Abbasids) and place scope of research is Khorasan and Transoxiana.

The term Shi'ite or Alawi is called to the ones who used to defend political rights of the descendants of Imam Ali (AS).

Religious beliefs of Turks before Islam and role of these beliefs in the process of Islamisation

It cannot say that an integrative religious system was dominant among Turks before Islam. There existed a variety of religions throughout Middle East. Ancestral worship and soul worship have been the religious beliefs among Turks, yet there were some differences between these two types of worships. Ancestral worship was considered to clans, yet soul worship was considered to Turks. Notably, Turks used to worship mountains.

Keywords:
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Turks used to worship eternal blue sky, goddess of the earth, spirits of the mountains and the sea, yet they were in favor of Buddhism from the early. They used to welcome evangelists who were Nestorian priests, and after familiarity to religion Mani, some of them joined to this religion. Zoroastrianism has also spread around regions and territories in Central Asia. Shamanism has been another beliefs of Turks which meant magic and magicians, dancers, musicologists and wise.

High welfare level at Turks' living area has caused invasion of the nation to this area, whereby the religions such as Christianity, Zoroastranism, Manicheaism and Buddhism without any barrier or reaction by Turks have emerged and spread at this area. As Turks had not an integrative religious system, they behaved with all religions without any bias and narrow-mindedness and with consolidation. In the beginning, Shamanism was recognized as religion of Turks before Islam, yet this theory in upcoming research was confirmed that Shamanism does not only belong to the Turks, but also has spread as magical and religious organizations throughout Asia. Further, Shamanism has spread among Turks by the Mongols, that nothing has been seen from Shamanism among Turks before invasion by the Mongols. At central Asian communities, religious life has been more likely centralized around the concept of Shamanism, yet it must assume that all religious activities have been centralized at this concept, because the religion of Shamanism has been defined only as the technique of ecstasy. Turks called the ones believing in Shamanism as the ones with strong religious beliefs and assumed that these people enable to connect to God and are professional at magic. Further, Turks believed in the ones believing in Shamanism as the ones who connect to ghosts of dead persons, devils, and fairy and believed them as the mediator of God to resolve their problems. These moral characters, in addition to organizing religious ceremonies, used to heal people by medicine. The common God worshiped by Turks has been Gok Tanri which meant God of sky. Turks knew the people believed in Shamanism as the ones enabled to connect to Gok Tanri. Gok Tanri has been superior to all Gods available at the age of Turks. Gok Tanri has appeared as the man in the highest class of Sky, and determined the destiny of the man by have a control over the world. Gok Tanri has been the manifestation of beauty and the Turks had a great desire to whom. Turks' behavior with dead persons indicates their belief to the world after life. Barthold, quoted from Orkhon inscriptions, argues that majority of Turks believed that the man’s soul transforms to a bird or insect after death. Belief in ghost develops a large portion of the Shamanic Turks’ beliefs. They divided the elegance universe into sky, land and underground.

Further, worship of fire, sun and moon was common among Turks. Worship of Totems and desire to magic has been also Shamanic Turks’ religious features. Shamanism, as the old religion of ‘Turks, is more likely assumed to be a magic rather than a religion, which orders souls, Jins and fairies and forecasts the future. Shamanism is accordingly a belief that has influenced the individuals and people at the regions in which it has been spread. Before Islam, no religious integration and thorough religious dominance have emerged among Turks. Further, no religious war derived from religious fanaticism and religious extremism such as Persia and Byzantium in Turks’ social life. However, Turks have joined in many religions before Islam Islam has had the largest share in their religious world. This is mainly due to this fact that liberal and democratic ideas have governed Turks’ personality and mind. For this, at Umayyad age, the reason for Turk’s opposition to Islam which has been in favor of their intellectual and personality system, has been unsuitable policies that Umayyads have taken. At the Abbasids age, suitable policy of Abbasids as well as Turks’ religious beliefs had a large share in Islamisation of Turks, because Turks believed in a superior God named GokTaneri before Islam. before Islam, Turks used to live far from cities in nomad’s tent. For this, they had no desire to religion, and at the early of experiencing Islam, they relied upon their ethnic traditions and faced no change and development in their life. In the meantime, they had a positive view on the beliefs which were similar to the Shamanic beliefs. At this age, Muslim sheikhs have been the best alternative for Shamanic Turks who had dignity and also a solution for any problem. Muslim sheikhs have trained Islam to the nomadic Turks with an extensive meaning and soul and had a major role in Islamisation of Turks. Further, in Muslim Turks’ beliefs, some Christian inculcations like similarity of God to the man and some Shi’a theological beliefs as well as some religious beliefs of Turks like belief in Gok Taneri and some of common beliefs between old religion of Turks and Bateni religion like place of Ali(AS) have emerged in the sky. Bateni Shia that firstly appeared among Turks for their political intentions, pledged the false promise of paradise to the Turks to attract them to themselves, and could finally attract them to Bateni religion by making them afraid of Sunni religion, because Bateni Shia had not believed in Islam’s religious duties and responsibilities. This was in this way that remnants of old religion of various nations that have been almost just Superstitions were entered into Islamic beliefs. Alavi-shia beliefs have spread mainly by the ones who believed in Bateni religion. As a result, the probability for expansion of Islam among some of Turks through Bateni Shia whose religion had huge similarity to the religions of Manichaean, Buddhism and Shamanism, goes beyond.

Umayyad age:

The process of Islamization of the Turks is one of the most important events in Turk's history and the world's history, because Turks have established government within Islamic countries and transformed to the strongest defenders of Islam and The biggest representative of the Islamic civilization. Turks firstly as
individual groups and then as tribal groups joined process of Islamization. Muslim Turks joined Islamic government, and for this the process of Islamization has been regarded with a huge progress. During the second Caliph, Muslim army came to Iran after defeat of Syrian and Byzantine, and also defeated Sasanian in the battle (14 AH/637 CE) of Ghadesieh and joined Iran. With the conquest occurred at Omar age, the early relationship between Turks and Arabs was emerged. However, passing through Amu Darya has been forbidden for Muslim army, Muslim Arab army has ignored this ban later and started their invasions to the South Turkestan. In beginning, the invasions fulfilled for the purpose of conquests for the act of plundering. By election of Qutaybaibn Muslim as the governor of Khurasan in 86 AH/715 CE, the conquests had more progress and major business centers like Balkand, Bukhara and Samarkand were conquered. Yet, Qutaybaibn Muslim did no longer continue his achievements acquired in religious arena at military and used to continue pillage and massacre in the lands conquered by Arabs. Despite early relationship between Turks and Arabs, arrival of groups of Turks to Islam and reaching their population to an extent to establish a government took three centuries. Various religions among Turks indicate Turks' welcome to any religion and belief. Here, a question is asked why Islam has not had a rapid progress among Turk, although Islam has had a total consistency with Turks' spirit of tolerance.

Without doubt, unsuitable policies by Umayyad government agencies have a huge effect on delay at rapid progress among Turk. These policies have increased Turks' detestation and prevented the process of Islamization of the Turks. Apart from this, during the Umayyad age at conquered regions, non-Arabs who joined Islam were conveyed as governors, and were considered as second-class citizens at political, religious, social and administrative areas. However governors were Muslim and participated in conquests, they were obliged to pay taxes and receive lower earning. This has caused the Turks harbor grudge against the Umayyad. Governors' dissatisfaction with the Umayyad has been the reason which caused the Abbasids centralizes their activities against the Umayyad. Abu Muslim Khorasani who has undertaken this battle organized the battle by the help of followers who were governors. Accordingly, Arab domination under The Umayyads, in addition to spread of Islam and dominance over the Turks, has caused delay at spread of Islam among Turks. At this age, there were few Turks who served at various arenas in Islamic government, that they had been hired at military. However, great conquests were made at the Umayyads and various nations hired at government, there were few Turks who hired in government.

Improper policy was displayed during the Umayyad rule except the rule of Umar ibnAbd al-Aziz. At this age, human values including Islam as the absolute rule and the concepts such as truth, justice and equality have been transformed to sweet nostalgia from the age of the holy prophet Mohammed and prophet's companions. Due to improper policies at the Umayyad age in the government, Islam not just as a religion which relies on religious and divine intentions, but also as a religion with economic purposes, had expanded. For this, at this age, Turks who had not the opportunity to receive original religious concepts from the original source, firstly were familiarized with Islam as well as Shia propaganda s for their political purposes rather than religious purposes. As a result, the conquests which have been fulfilled at Turks' living areas at Umayyad age could not conquer people's heart at this age. For this, Umayyad government agencies obliged to respect Turks' ethnic traditions and customs and consider policy of religious tolerance. Apart from this, missionaries who traveled to Turkistan from various religious sects, obliged to respect ethnical traditions and customs at this region and express flexibility to these traditions and customs. For this, due to improper interpretation of Shamanic and Islamic beliefs by missionaries, a series of futile and misguided beliefs were emerged in Islam. In this study, we will investigate some of activities of Shia Muslims to attract advocates among Turks and also status and reaction of Turks against these activities. As known, competition between the Bani Hashim and the Bani Umayyad which dates back to the age of ignorance, has continued in Islamic age and displayed in all lands in which Islam was spread. Concurrent with the early invasions by the Umayyad to Turkistan, thousands of people who suffered from Karbala' Chain of Events and battles of Jamal and Siffin and had an endless sorrow in their heart and harbored a grudge against the Umayyad, entered to Turkistan. The Umayyad which failed in invasions to Turkestan considered Arab immigrant settlement policy in Turkestan and granted settlement to about fifty thousand cavalry Arabs in Takharistan and mountain area. Further, followers of Imam Ali who were subjected to oppression and prosecution by the Umayyad obliged to immigrate to remote areas at Iraq and Turkestan and the Iranian plateau region. Population of the Shia sect (Alawites) keeps increasing in Tabarestan , Azerbaijan and the Caspian Sea. Alawites propaganda s have continued in Turkestan and Gorgon since 98 AD until the Abbasid caliph Mansur for 40 years. Turks have been familiar to Alawite beliefs through Muslim traders and Alawi followers before being faced with Umayyad army.

Alawi followers, who joined in religious activities among Turks, informed them about authoritarianism of Umayyad by taking advantage from Turks' detestation against the Umayyad. Turks due to their life conditions could not learn ideological and religious teachings of Islam from the original source, and they accepted whatever introduced to them as religion, and mixed their old teachings of Islam with beliefs of new religion.

Dissatisfaction of the tribes who were living under rule of the Umayyad and could not maintain their ethnical identity was resolved by Alawi followers. Turks who opposed to the Umayyad governors were
influenced of Shia-Bateni beliefs. Turks due to the Umayyad's improper policies to administer the nations' affairs were centered at insurrection against the Umayyad dynasty and fought for justice and caused creation of the Abbasids.

**Abbasid period:**

However, many tribes selected their settlement at Islamic government at Umayyad dynasty, central government policy has relied on absolute Arabism and advocates of Umayyad dynasty who developed a class by means of blood relations have continued their life under rule of Arab government. In contrast, social non-Arab groups who were under pressure in social and economic aspects were taken for slavery by the government, whereby a dissident group from central government was formed inside Umayyad Empire. Effect of activities of this dissident group against government was revealed after a short while, that Umayyad dynasty lost its religious, social and political power under influence of Abu Muslim Khorasani's activities. Due to Umayyad's injustice that had been inflicted on the family of Imam Ali, resistance against the Umayyad especially the wish to take revenge of Karbala kept increasing among Shiites that Bani Abbas has used this situation and continued their propaganda by the name of Imams. Imam Muhammad bin Ali Abbasi who undertook leadership of Abbasid Revolution has learnt how to manage this propaganda to his followers by the belief in necessity of subjective preparation for changing caliphate with predetermined preparations. Imam Muhammad bin Ali who was well known to consciousness and futurism gave a piece of advice to his followers in order not to mention any name in invitation to Islam and just invite people to Islam. Imam Muhammad bin Ali has had specified two important centers, i.e. Kufa and Khorasan as the best areas for invitation, because Kufa has been the settlement for advocates of Imams for a long time and also people in Khorasan have declared their readiness to acceptance of Shia beliefs. As a result, governor's dissatisfaction with the Umayyad and continuity of tribal competitions by Arabs and ambitions by some political groups under the Umayyad caused collapse of the Umayyad and the rise of the Abbasids(132 AH / 750 AD). Replacing the Abbasid with the Umayyad has not been just a coup and change of dynasty, but this change is considered as an turning point in history of Islam. Turks and Arabs due to the Umayyad's improper policies were not in a good relationship with each other, that they joined Chinese in battle of Talas(133 AD / 751 AD). This battle caused amity between Turks and Arabs, caused the Turks to join Islam and serve in Islamic government. Thereby, the relationships between Turks and Arabs that have been dark for 100 centuries transformed to peace and friendship, so that the age of blood battle ended and replaced with amity. After Abbasids' victory against the Umayyads, they considered their policy to establish a government based on justice and put their maximum effort to resolve existing defects at the government. Adoption of proper policies by Abbasids caused acceleration in the process of Islamisation by Turks. A part from this, Abbasids employed Turks and Iranians who were advocates in the oppression to Umayyads at different sectors. Abbasids in reaction to ethnocentric policy of Umayyads considered the policy of removing Arabs from the government.

Turks were employed in military at the early years of Abbasid government. This process was more likely developed at the age of Abbasi Caliph and Mamun Caliph, whereby most of Turks at South Turkistan joined in Islam affected by the policy of Abbasi Caliphate. Briefly, it must be noted that amity between Turks and Abbasids and gradual influence of Turks at Abbasi Caliph caused development of trade as well as arrival of dervishes and Sufis together with trade caravan to the Turks' land, and this played a major role in spread of Islam among Turks. Followed by investigation into how Islam was spread among Turks and acceptance of Islam among Turks at the age of Abbasi Caliph, here we examine Alavi- Shiite beliefs entered into the Turks.

**Influence of Alavi-shiite beliefs among Turks at the age of Abbasi Caliph:**

Building friendly relationship between Turks and Arabs at the age of Abbasi Caliph and development of favorable political-economic environment after battle of Talas have caused influence of Alavi- Shiite followers to Turkestan and speed of spread of Alavi- Shiite beliefs at this region. Abbasids at all their propaganda activities as well as Alavi- Shiite uprisings at the Umayyad age as the followers of Imams expressed that they have been known as descendants of Ali (AS ). With the arrival of the Caliphate of Bani Abbas, followers of Alavi religion in describing the existing status faced problem, thereby all the uprisings at the age of Umayyad remained fruitless. Deprivation of descendants of Ali (AS ) from caliphate caused sorrow in people and formation of many uprisings among the people who were against Abbasids. Turks at all movements fulfilled by the name of imams undertook an important role and duty. With the arrival of the Abbasid Caliphate instead of Umayyad Caliphate and deprivation of descendants of Ali (AS ) from caliphate, Shiites became hopeless. Abbasids strived to satisfy the Shiites by attracting and supporting them by giving large amount of money to them. Murder of Abu Muslim Khorasani in Baghdad by Abbasids, yet he had huge activities within Turkestan and caused spread of Alavi- Shiite beliefs at that region and had a huge role in the rise of the Abbasids, caused new popular uprisings as well as the growing power of Shia were come to realize. Murder of Abu Musalam caused facilitation of activities by Bateni Shiites. Bateni Shiites propagated this belief that Abu Muslim Khorasani has been alive and has been living in Rey. Under such circumstances, on one hand Abbasids used Turks at military positions and applied an army which had been developed from Turks for the purpose of
fighting with Bateni Shiites. On the other hand, Bateni Shiites used an opportunity and adjusted their beliefs with old beliefs and culture of region and supplied it as Islam to the Turks. At this age, Muslim Turks were granted Islam not by Arabs but by Iranians through Khorasan and Transoxiana. The relationship between Turks and some Bateni Shiites must not be interpreted as spread of Shiites among Turks, because Turks at the age of Abbasids gave the opportunity for recognition of Islam, and many Sunni followers appear among them.

At the first period of Abbasid government followed by oppression to advocates of Imam Ali (AS), Muhammad ibn Abdullah ibn al-Hasan well-known to al-Nafs al-Zakiyya, one of the Hassani Alawites, who hoped for Caliphate before rise of Abbasid rule, upraised at the early of Rajab 145 AH in Medina, and most of descendants of Ali (AS) and some among Bani Abbas joined him, yet Abbasids immediately attacked Medina to suppress uprising and Muhammad ibn Abdullah ibn al-Hasan was killed by Isa ibn Sawrah ibn Mosa, uncle of Mansour Abbasi. Followed by these events, to get rid of oppression and suppression of Abbasids, Alawites went to the areas far from caliphate center such as Khorasan and Turkestan and engaged in Shia propaganda at these regions. Shia and sects used the open intellectual space which had emerged at the age of Abbasid caliph Mamun and pursued a development process. Despite opposition to Abbasid dynasty, Mamun decided to grant power to a person among descendants of Ali (AS). Separate from this, the books in the context of philosophical and intellectual beliefs which have been translated to Arabic language influenced Muslims’ beliefs in a negative form. Spread of these beliefs paved the way for spread of beliefs at ignorance age and caused arrival of beliefs of the religions including Zoroastrianism, Manichaeanism, Mazdak, shamanism and Greek and West philosophical thoughts to the Islamic beliefs. In the history of Islam, thousands of religious beliefs were entered into religion of Islam from the original sources. Religious sects who had emerged by means of friendship with imams remained far from their originality due to influence of intellectual process in them. More specifically, all the movements involved in activities against Abbasids, selected area of Transoxiana as a suitable area for spread of their thoughts. Because Alavi-Shiite advocates at the early years of Abbasids Caliphate, knew Umayyad Caliphate better than Abbasids Caliphate.

For this, they went Turkestan to spread their thoughts and represented messages and thoughts which were relevant with their thoughts to the tribes, such that integration was emerged between old beliefs of Turks and beliefs of Bateni Shiites. These Bateni-Shiite missionaries among Turk nomadic tribes caused emergence of Bateni sects which were opposite to the beliefs of Sunnis. In summary, in suppression of some political and religious uprisings that occurred at the age of Abbasids, some Turk tribes were employed as a fresh manpower. Under such situation, Bateni-Shiite sects which engaged in activities against Abbasids employed some Turk tribes at area of Transoxiana, such that similarities emerged between old beliefs of Turks and Bateni Shiite beliefs, whereby these two beliefs get close to each other. The Turks who were influenced of Bateni Shiites accepted common thoughts better than closed and theoretical thoughts, because they had not the power of understanding conflicts in various religious and philosophical views.

Difference on religious understanding of urban Turks and nomadic Turks and factors affecting it

At the early age of Islam, Turks generally familiarized with gnosticism not through religious scholars but also through dervishes. The Turks who were living in cities after joining in Islam learned major teachings of Islam and engaged in their religious instructions, yet the Turks who were living in nomads centralized at major teachings of Islam and almost accepted Islam and continued the religious life which has been associated to their old beliefs. The Turks who were living in cities and belonged to higher social classes learnt Islam from the original sources without fusion of Islam with other religions, for this they selected Sunni Islam which has been the religion of government. Yet, the Turks who were living in nomads continued their previous life after joining Islam, that man and woman were together in their religious customs and also religious rituals were fulfilled with excitement. Old beliefs of Turks were arrived to the sects, e.g. Ahmad Fauzi Rifai, Refai’i sect’s founder and his disciples till the Turks had not come to Iraq were not informed of the actions such as taking fire in their hands or dipping the skewer in the body and the same tasks. Further, mystics’ and ascetics’ a long time of starving, doing extraordinary things, futurism and the same beliefs which were from principles and actions of shamanism were entered to the sects by Turks. Further, there were similarities between actions of Turks and Muslims in asking for rain, that Turks used to open and scatter their hairs and murmur and also Muslims used to go under rain and murmur the name of God. Turkmen who understood Islam just a little and used to live in nomads far from cultural Islamic centers, Strived to maintain their old beliefs after joining Islam. At the 18th century, beliefs of Ghazaghi-Gherghiz Muslims who were living in Ghebchagh plains were mixed with Shamanic beliefs. Islam which has arrived among nomadic and urban Turkmen since Ninth and tenth centuries AD has developed two distinctive cultural and social environments. Nomadic Turks that settled in nomads were propagated by Iranian Sufis and then Turk Sufis, and had high nature of mysticism. At a short while, nomadic Islam has attracted old religious structures and differed from Sunni Islam from numerous aspects. Nomadic Turks despite urban Turks, due to their lifestyle, used to immigrate continuously, that they were deprived from religious schools and were not allowed to join in teaching centers. Nomadic Turks who had not the knowledge of reading and writing could not understand religious instructions of Islam like praying and fasting which required discipline and dedication. This type of Islam was entered into Anatolia by nomadic Turks.
at the sixth century. Old beliefs of Turks were not neglected by Turks, but some concepts of their beliefs were changed. As a result, nomadic Turks maintained their old beliefs at all stages of their life and developed a unique Islam for Turks. In this way, the difference in the Islam which is taught by dervishes and the Islam which is based on school teachings is revealed.

Conclusion:
Various religions among Turks indicate freedom of thinking among them. Despite religious tolerance among Turks, in beginning Islam has no progress among them; the reason for this can be known as improper policies of Umayyad against them. Umayyad attacked Turkestan not for spread of Islam but for plundering. Further, Umayyad believed in Arabs as a group worse than Turks and Iranians and called them governors and second-class citizens. What aforementioned above causes lack of Turks’ desire to Islam. In this regard, Alaviit because of being dissatisfied with Umayyads, found Transoxiana as a suitable place for their propaganda and followers of Alavi engaged in their religious propaganda among Turks. Nomadic Turks were deprived from learning teachings of Islam due to their lifestyle, that they mixed shamanism with new religion. Turks due to the spread of Islam but for plundering.

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