

## THE ROLE OF SUFISM IN THE INTRODUCTION OF TURKS TO ISLAM

### TÜRKLERİN İSLAM'A GİRİŞİNDE TASAVVUFUN ROLÜ

Assistant Professor Dr. Tunay KARAKÖK

Bartın University, The Faculty of Literature, The Department of History, Bartın / Turkey  
ORCID: 0000-0003-4028-2418

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#### ABSTRACT

Before Islam, Turks belonged to religions such as Tengricism, Buddhism, Manichaeism, Christianity and Judaism. Turks, who have managed to establish relations with different societies on various occasions, especially in socio-cultural and political relations in various geographies, have also taken place in their religious life thanks to these relations. The most important of these changes and transformations has been the transition to Islam. At this point; The first encounter between pre-Islamic Turks and Muslim Arabs in the VIIth century was the Islamic Caliph Hz. It took place during the Omar period. In the period after the Four Caliphs, Islam was a religion that developed more on the axis of Arab nationalism, especially during the Umayyad period. In this period, the Islamic State expanded considerably with new conquests and reached Transoxiana. Here, in this study, the role of Sufism, which is one of the influential factors in Turker's acceptance of the religion of Islam, has been emphasized. With the emergence of Sufism, this religious acceptance of Turker based on the sources of the period and the effect of Sufism scholars in this acceptance, together with the view of Turks to these personalities and Sufism, some Sufis who were effective in the spread of Islam among the Turks were included.

**Key words:** Islam, Sufism, Turks

#### ÖZET

Türkler; İslam dininden önce Tengricilik, Budizm, Maniheizm, Hıristiyanlık ve Yahudilik gibi dinlere mensup olmuştur. Çeşitli dönemlerde, çeşitli coğrafyalarda sosyo-kültürel ve siyasi münasebetler başta olmak üzere çeşitli vesilelerle farklı toplumlar ile münasebetler kurmayı başarmış olan Türklerin bu ilişkiler sayesinde dini hayatında da değişim ve dönüşümler meydana gelmiştir. Bu değişim ve dönüşümlerin en önemlisi de İslam'a geçiş olmuştur. Bu noktada; İslamiyet öncesi Türkler ile Müslüman Arapların ilk karşılaşmasının 7. yüzyılda İslam Halifesi Hz. Ömer döneminde gerçekleşmiştir. Dört Halife'den sonraki süreçte ise özellikle Emeviler döneminde İslam daha çok Arap milliyetçiliği ekseninde gelişmekte olan bir dindi. Öyle ki bu dönemde İslam Devleti yeni fetihlerle oldukça genişlemiş, Maveraünnehir'e kadar ulaşmıştır. İşte bu çalışmada; Türker'in İslam dinini kabulünde etkili olan faktörlerden biri olan tasavvuf'un rolü üzerinde durulmuştur. Tasavvuf'un ortaya çıkışı ile dönem kaynakları esas alınarak Türker'in bu dini kabulü ve bu kabulde tasavvuf erbablarının etkisi, Türklerin bu şahsiyetlere ve tasavvufa bakışı ile Türkler arasında İslamiyet'in yayılmasında etkili olmuş bazı mutasavvıflara yer verilmiştir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** İslam, Tasavvuf, Türkler

#### 1. INTRODUCTION

The fact that they are Muslim has been a topic that has been discussed in science World and among scientists many years, usually within ideological frameworks. According to two common views on this issue in Turkey, Islam spread by sword among Turks or Turks converted to this religion voluntarily and collectively thanks to the similarities between Islam and old Turkish beliefs. However, these views are insufficient to explain this phenomenon, which took place in very large areas over a long period of time in different ways. The wars between Arabs and Turks and indigenous peoples on fronts such as Turkistan and the Caucasus in the VIIth and VIIIth centuries have been studied in detail several times before. Here in this study; The role of Sufism, which is one of the influential factors in Turker's acceptance of the religion of Islam, has been emphasized. With the emergence of Sufism, this religious acceptance of Turker based on the sources of the period and the effect of Sufism scholars in this acceptance, the view of Turks to these personalities and Sufism, and some Sufis who were effective in the spread of Islam among the Turks were included.

Muslims did not pressure people to change their beliefs anywhere they dominated. Despite this, many nations accepted the religion of Islam and became Muslims. People who tried to spread this religion and live it in its entirety were influential in this. It is possible to count the Sufis at the beginning of these. They have fulfilled all their responsibilities in this way. The Sufi activities of Sufis, which had an impact in terms of spiritual and moral aspects, succeeded in time and became the most important factor in the conversion of many nations to Islam. Sufism has a great influence on the Islamization of the Turks. However, these have not been fully revealed today. Researches on this subject is not sufficient. Our aim is to make a small contribution to the researches by revealing the importance of this issue with our work. In the main headings of our study, we first included general information on the subject, then our main subject, the role and importance of Sufism in the Islamization of the Turks. We discussed the services of some Sufis such as

İbrahim b. Edhem, Şakhik-i Belkhi, Mansour Hallaj, Ahmad Yasawi and Suleyman Bakırghani. At every stage of our study, we tried to point out that one of the points that should be taken into consideration in understanding the acceptance of Islam by Turks is Sufism activities and to investigate to what extent these activities have contributed to Islamization and to draw conclusions.

## 2. THE EMERGENCE OF SUFISM

As a natural consequence of political expansion, Islamic states have also enriched culturally and socially. This wealth has brought along with it the emergence of a lifestyle that leads to luxury, debauchery and even waste. With these changes, there have been differences in the understanding of Islam between new generations and older generations. Older generations started to long for the first years of Islam and adopted a mystical lifestyle called the *zuhd movement*. After these developments took place in the first century of Islam, in the centuries that followed, a movement of Sufism, called *Sufism*, which was to be built on this infrastructure, emerged. Sufism remained under the influence of pre-Islamic mystical cultures, rather than being an understanding that emerged only with Islam. While these interactions were emerging, many verses and concepts of the Quran were used, and these concepts were combined with the insights taken from mystical cultures. In time, the ascetic of Islam attained a mystical content and turned into what we call Sufism. This situation has resulted in the people of Sufism trying to leave the world as an ascendant on the one hand and bring mystical interpretations to religious issues on the other hand (İnan, 1954: 206; Ocak, 1999: 163-164; İbn Haldun, 2004: 669; Kara, 1992: 10-11; Aşkar, 2001: 15; Kara, 2006: 21).

It is accepted that the understanding of Islamic mysticism emerged in the VIIIth century and it is seen that the previous times were adopted as the *zuhd* period. In this sense, the name of Hasan al-Basri is mentioned as the first great sufist. The religious ideas of Hasan al-Basri are the same as those of Ahl al-Sunnah. Since the ninth century, the *zuhd* movement began to change and gained a mystical character. Harîs el-Muhâsibî is one of the most influential people in the *Zühd* movement entering into such a change. In the age of *zühd* that has continued until this time, there was no Sunni creed conflict. At this new point, with the emergence of the understanding of Sufism, Zünnûn-ı Mısrî, Bâyezid-i Bistamî, Cüneyd-i Bağdadî and Mansour Hallaj began to be accused of engaging in irreligious behavior. As a matter of fact, sufis had to prove that their thoughts were compatible with Islam. In such a situation, it was necessary to ensure unity and harmony between the understanding of Sufism and the belief of ahl as-Sunnah. People such as Tirmidhi, Tüsterî and Harrâz were the first to study this subject. However, the most important Sufis was al-Ghazali who strived to establish the connection between Sunni Islam and Sufism and to prevent Sufism from taking an un-Islamic direction. Ghazali tried to show that Sunnism and Sufism or shari'ah and sect are not separate things in Islam, and they are both one, and he has been largely successful. As a matter of fact, instead of separate groups called *ulama* and *sufi*, scholars-sufis or *sufi-scholars* emerged after al-Ghazali (Aşkar, 2001: 15; Köprülü, 1976: 16; Ocak, 1999: 165; Güngör, 1982: 65-85; Kafesoğlu, 1983: 342; Turan, 1969: 139; Yıldız, 1976: 76).

## 3. TURKS, SUFISM AND SUFIS'

Although the efforts to spread Islam continued in the steppes inhabited by nomadic Turks for a long time since the Umayyad period, the desired result could not be achieved. According to Barthold and Osman Turan, the form of Islam described by the jurists could not meet the needs of the nomadic Turks. Erol Güngör states that this understanding conveyed by the jurists does not meet the mystical needs of the nomadic Turks as in the previous beliefs. According to him, the Islamization movement in Asia started to gain momentum with the emergence of Islamic mysticism from the ascetic period and gaining a mystical character. Sheikhs and other Sufi personalities had a great influence on the Turkish community and had the opportunity to realize what the jurists could not (Barthold, 1990: 200; Turan, 1969: 232; Güngör, 1982: 65, 85, 185, Ocak, 1999: 165). The beliefs of the Turks before Islam emerged as a unique religion, determined by the social and economic conditions they lived in. Although they have recognized new beliefs over time, they have been able to adapt their old beliefs to this. Therefore, the Turks, who had been under the influence of the religions before Islam for many years, could not completely eliminate these effects with Islam and treated some of them as an Islamic motif. It was not difficult for the Turks, who could not completely get out of the influence of their pre-Islamic religions and adapt some features of their old religions to their new religion, accepting Islamic saints, sufis, dervishes and followers. Because the nature of the kings in their previous beliefs and the nature of this group in Islam, which is their new religion, were similar to each other. This change was not felt much, while the miracles of the miracles and the Sufis and dervishes that emerged together with Islam and then Sufism replaced each other. These people, who spread the Sufi understanding of Islam, were also called "*Horasan Erenleri*". The Horasan Erenler were not people who were at a higher cultural level than the mass they tried to spread Islamic mysticism. Most of them were not even illiterate.

They learned something from Sufis in Khorasan region where Sufism was intense and they started to teach others what they learned. Their simplicity made it easier for them to better penetrate the nomadic people (Ocak, 2000: 91-92; Ocak, 1999: 14; Turan, 1971: 14; Köprülü, 1976: 19; Güngör, 1982: 186). Despite all this, among the Turks in Central Asia, Sufis such as Muhammed Maşuk Tusî and Amir Ali Abu Hâlis, who emerged before Hodja Ahmad Yasawi, could not be able to establish a strong Sufi movement. A great sect that had lived for centuries among the Turks was established with Hodja Ahmad Yasawi. In addition, it was the first sect established by a Turk and among Turks (Köprülü, 1976: 18, 20, 114).

After the acceptance of Islam by the Turks, first of them fiqh scholars and then people of Sufism began to emerge. Muslim Turkish rulers respected and respected both groups and tried to be in good relations with them. In this regard, the administrators were advised even in the first written works of the Turks. For example, Kutadgu Bilig contains many recommendations on this matter. First of all, it was told that the clergy should be respected, fed and drunk, and it was said that they were like a torch that enlightened the way of people. In addition, it was explained that the knowledge of the clergy should be taken into consideration and their words should be respected, a good relationship should be established and a good get-along should be made. It has been reported that both world happiness can be achieved by acting in this way (Ocak, 2011: 276; Kutadgu Bilig, 1974: 314). In the next period, similar suggestions were made in the work named *Siyasatnama* written by Nizam al-Mulk who was the Seljukian statesman (Nizamülmülk, 2009: 77). As can be understood from the expressions in the *Siyasatnama*, it is stated that Nizam al-Mulk showed great love and respect to the Sufis and offered them treats. As can be understood from this situation, it is seen that the recommendations written to the managers in Kutadgu Bilig were implemented by Nizamülmülk. In Turkish history, different personalities have shown a similar understanding for clergymen and complimented these people. This situation continued in the same way for the Turkish states established after the Seljuk State and the principalities established in Anatolia. As a result of the respectful attitude shown to clergymen and Sufis, these figures came to the geographies where principalities were established intensely (Selçukname, 1977: 10).

#### 4. THE ROLE OF SUFISM IN TURKS' CONVERSION TO ISLAM

The first contacts between Turks and Muslim Arabs started with the capture of Iran by Muslim Arabs after the Battle of Nahavand in 642. Especially after the conquests in the Caliphate Omar period, Muslim Arabs and Turks came face to face in Khorasan, Transoxiana and the Caucasus. The conquests, which were started in Transoxiana by 'Ubayd Allâh ibn Ziyâd, the governor of Khorasan of Muawiyah, were later continued by Qutayba ibn Muslim and a strong Muslim Arab rule was established here. The relationships that increased as a result of this domination generally led to the formation of hostile attitudes and wars took place between them. However, there were few conversion events. Although the number of Muslims among Turks increased especially during the reign of the Umayyad caliph Omar bin Abdulaziz, when we look at the Umayyad rule in general, it is seen that the number of conversion events remained limited (Yıldız, 1987: 17-18; Barthold, 1990: 200). With the transition of Islamic rule to the Abbasids, the asabiyetist policies of the Umayyads were abandoned and instead, policies based on granting equal rights to all Muslims began to be implemented. These policies also resulted in the convergence of Turks with Arabs. During the Talas war in 751, Turks and Arabs fought on the same front against the Chinese, providing an environment for the spread of Islam against Chinese rule in Central Asia. After this period, Turks started to get to know Muslim Arabs better. With the effect of friendly relations between them, Turks adopted Islam individually or in small families. On the one hand, while these developments were taking place, on the other hand, the number of Turkish soldiers in the Caliphate army started to increase. In fact, by the time of Caliph Mamun, the balance of power in the army was distorted in favor of the Turks. Al-Jâhîz says that the virtues of the Turks are effective on this issue, and mentions that especially Mutasim gathered the Turks around him and made grants. As a result of this, Mutasim even became caliph with the support of Turkish troops (Yıldız, 1987: 19; Kara, 2006: 21-23; Kafesoğlu, 1983: 342; Turan, 1969: 139; el-Câhîz, 1964: 76; Yıldız, 1976: 76).

On the other hand, when it comes to the Karakhanid period in Central Asia, the Karakhanid ruler Abdulkarim Satuq Bughra Khan became a Muslim before the ruler, and then made efforts for the spread of Islam in the Karakhanid State. With the conversion of the Karakhanids to Islam, the conversion of other Turks to Islam has accelerated. It is rumored that during the reign of Baytaş Arslan Han, son of Satuq Bughra Khan, two hundred thousand Turkish tents entered the religion of Islam in the 960s. The influence of the caravan routes, and therefore trade, on the Turks' adoption of the religion of Islam was great. Thanks to these roads, cultural exchange as well as trade took place. By this means, Muslim merchants made an effort to spread the religion of Islam and provided great services in this regard. In addition to these, Turks have been

influential in their adoption of this religion since they are the only gods they have had, the survival of the soul, the life of the hereafter, the beliefs of heaven and hell, and the basic tenets of the religion of Islam (İbnü'l-Esir, 1987: 81; Özeydin, 2001: 406; İnan, 1954: 206; Kara, 2006: 47-49; Turan, 1969: 151).

When we look at the issue of the role of Islamic sufism in the acceptance of Islam by the Turks after the Turks' conversion to Islam, the sources really reveal how important the role of sufism and sufis in this process is. From the VIIIth century in Khorasan and Maverounnahr regions, mystical activities began to appear. In these regions, which fall within the borders of Islam, people were mostly influenced by Sufism and accepted this path. The main reason for this was that the ancient Turkish religion, which was a mystical religion, was closer to Sufism. It is possible to think that the shamanism establishment, which constitutes the basis of the old Turkish mystical thought system, which the Turks have always seen and kept alive and whose experience they have come to continue, enabled the Turks to get used to Sufism quickly. According to the rumors, the great poet Dede Korkut Ata, who was a cam in the beginning, went to Arabia in order to understand Islam and later became a Muslim by meeting with the Caliphate Abu Bakr and this incident spoke from language to language and this event shows that the old religion may also have an effect on the Islamization of the Turks. In other words, when the Turks started to get to know Islam closely, dervishes known as *father* and *ancestor* began to replace the old kam and bards first (Köprülü, 1976: 50).

In addition, it has been said that religions such as Buddhism and Christianity, which the Turks have adopted over time, were effective in their inclination to this aspect of Islam first. The life stories of İbrahim b. Ethem and Şakik-i Belhi, who lived in this period and considered among the greatest of Khorasan Sufis, have always been material by Westerners, and it has been claimed that they were influenced by ancient religions, especially Buddhism. Ribāts are the leading institutions that played an important role in the Islamization of the Turks. Ribats are the places where the job of watching the enemy is done in the borders. At the same time, it became a shelter and accommodation place for Sufis and dervishes who devoted themselves to the spread of the religion of Islam. In these ribats, which were established mostly for military purposes, with the expansion of the borders in time and the lands around them entering the Islamic circle, these institutions started to serve only the Sufis who tried to spread the religion of Islam, and they turned into dervish lodges and dervish lodges. Sufis raised in ribats were called *murabits*. Şakik-i Belhi, who was martyred on this road, was also counted as a *murabit* (Öztürk, 1999: 130; Yazıcı, 2002: 24; Günay-Güngör, 2003: 155). These institutions were Muslim people in the first years of Islam. Muslim rich people spent their wealth for these houses of Allah and they competed with each other and made many ribats as well as dervish lodges and dervish lodges. These veteran dervishes, who grew up in the spiritual upbringing of a murshid or sheikh, sometimes engaged in war and jihad against unbelieving Turks, especially in the spring and summer, sometimes joined the nomadic Turks as an army of saints and invited Islam to them (Kitapçı, 2004: 99-100). Among them, the dervish lodges and dervish lodges, which started with the founding of Abu Hashim as-Sufi in Damascus and became established in time, became indispensable places of Sufis in the following periods. By the Xth century, Baykand, Bukhara, Samarkand, Ferghana, etc. numerous dervish lodges and lodges were established for Sufis around the region. At the same time, old Buddhist Viharas were turned into dervish lodges and lodges in these places or new lodges were built next to them (Ocak, 1986: 469). Among the Turks, mystical movements such as Malāmatiyya, Karramiyya and Qalandariyyah have become widespread and have an important place in the recognition of Islam by the Turks. Bişir from Merv, who started the Malāmatiyya movement among them. It is said to be al-Haris al-Hafi. Bişir's ideas developed in Khorasan in a short time. Following this, the Malāmatiyya movement penetrated into the Maverounnahr region and spread widely among the Turks as a result of the activities of the Melameti Turkish dervishes. It is even said that Ahmad Yasawi was also affected by this movement. Later, it spread beyond the borders of Khorasan by means of some Malāmatis and became widespread in the whole Islamic world. Thus, over time, Malāmati-prone Sufis such as Zu'n-Nün al-Misri, Sehil et-Tüsteri, Juneydi Bagdadi, Mansour Hallajand Ibrahim al-Husri grew up in various parts of the Islamic World (Kenjetay, 2003: Arberry, 2004: 37).

Playing an active role in the spread of Islam among the Turks, one of the movements is the Sufi Abu Abdullah Muhammad b. It was the Karramiyya movement that emerged as Kerram. This movement gained supporters in Khorasan and Transoxiana regions and was effective in spreading Islam in these regions. Ibn Kerram himself traveled to Khorasana and gained supporters. In fact, thanks to the Karramiyya movement, it was said that Zoroastrians and Christians were also Muslims (Günay-Güngör, 2003: 299). It was the traveling Sufis who accelerated the Islamization of the Turks and made them love this religion. We can accept Hallac-ı Mansuru at the beginning of these. Mansour Hallaj traveled around Khorasan, Transoxiana, Sijistan, Isfahan and Turkestan for five years. He tried to preach the love of Allah to the people around here, he explained Islam and works for them. His activities deeply affected the Turks and led them to join Islam.

In fact, Mansour Hallaj is mentioned as the father of the Kyrgyz in the genealogy of the Kyrgyz Turks who adopted Islam late and shows us that he met Kyrgyz during his travels (Cebecioğlu, 329-335; Erşahin, 1999: 54-55). Mansour Hallaj came to Turkistan with his followers in 897 and invited the nomadic Turkish tribes to Islam. According to the opinion of some Kyrgyz researchers, the legends about Mansour Hallaj have continued among the peoples living in this region since then. At the same time, the narrations about Mansour Hallaj, which wandered between the Kyrgyz living here and the local people who later contributed to the formation of the Kyrgyz people, later took their place in the Kyrgyz genealogy.

However, the Sufis also invited statesmen to Islam and were successful. The Sufis initiated the process that resulted in the Karakhanid State becoming an Islamic state. As a matter of fact, as a result of the preaching of the Sufis, Sultan Satuq Bughra Khan, the nephew of the ruler of Karakhanid, became a Muslim, and later won the fight against his uncle and enabled the Western Karakhanids to officially accept the religion of Islam. The acceptance of Islam by Sultan Satuq Bughra Khan, who was named *Abdulkarim* after that, was an important turning point in the rapid conversion of Turks to Islam. After that, the adoption of Islam took place in very large societies. As a matter of fact, the Islamization of the Turks with 200,000 tents and 10,000 tents in some regions is the result of this process (Yazıcı, 2002: 65). During the period when the Turks started to accept Islam, Khorasan and Transoxiana regions started to be filled with Sufis. The Turks called their sheikhs the name *bab* (*father*). During this period, Mohammed Ma'shuk Tusi and Emir Ali Abu Halis, who were honored by the famous Sufi Abu Sa'd Abul No, were among the well-known Turkish Sufis. Their reputation became so famous that İmam Ghazali said the following about it: *"If only we were land, one day Muhammad Maşuk put his foot on him"* (Cami, 1971: 359). In this period, Sufism started to be officially recognized by the political forces due to the spread of Sufism and the closeness of the people to it. For this reason, elders, statesmen and even sultans were trying to attract Sufi sheikhs to their side. The Karakhanids, who adhered to religious decrees too much to drink wine, were the first Seljuks, who defended Islam with love and fervor, showed great respect to scholars and sheikhs. In addition, since the Turkish rulers adhered to Islamic creeds very much, the mystical ideas that developed around them developed in harmony with them.

Ahmad Yasawi and his followers were undoubtedly one of the notables of the Sufis, who introduced the Turks closely to Islam, made it popular and made it Islam. However, it should not be forgotten that before the emergence of Ahmad Yasawi, the ground for Sufi activities in the Turkish world was prepared. Köprülü reports the following on this issue: *"In our opinion, when Ahmad Yasawi emerged, the Turkish world had been accustomed to Sufi ideas for a long time, and the tales and miracles of the Sufis spread more or less not only in the cities but also among the nomadic Turks. The dervishes who read hymns, poems, did many favors to the people for the sake of Allah, showed them the ways of heaven and happiness, the Turks eagerly accepted by comparing them to the bards they used to give a religious blessing, and they believed what they said. It is not possible to deny that Ahmad Yasawi was a superior and stronger personality to the dervishes who came before him. However, his success would not have been so great if the generations that came before him had not laid the groundwork"* (Köprülü, 1976: 50). Sufi activities continue in the Turkish world after Ahmad Yasawi, many sects have emerged. The Turkish Sufis explained Islam to the public under the Naqshbandi, Qadiriyya, Kubreviyya, Mawlawiyya, and Bektashism orders and ensured the Islamization of the Turks to a large extent.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Turks started to be influenced by the Sufi activities that started to appear in Khorasan and Maveräünnehr regions since the VIIIth century and they started to accept this path by feeling close to them. The main reason for this was that the ancient Turkish religion, which was a mystical religion, was closer to Sufism. It is possible to think that the shamanism establishment, which constitutes the basis of the old Turkish mystical thought system, which the Turks have always seen and kept alive and whose experience they have come to continue, enabled the Turks to get used to Sufism quickly. Sufi activities played a large part in the Islamization of the Turks. Thousands of Sufi efforts have worked to carry out this activity and they have tried to appeal to every segment of the people in order to explain Islam. Among them, many well-known Sufis have grown. It was the traveling Sufis who accelerated the Islamization of the Turks and made them love this religion. We can accept İbrahim b. Ethem, Şakik-i Belhi and Mansour Hallaj. Among the Turks, such as Malāmatiyya, Karramiyya and Qalandariyyah sufi movements have become widespread and they took an important place. However, the Sufis also invited statesmen to Islam and were successful. Ahmad Yasawi and his followers were undoubtedly one of the notables of the Sufis who introduced the Turks closely, made them love and Islamized. Sufi activities continue in the Turkish world after Ahmad Yasawi and as a result, many sects emerged. Turkish Sufis explained Islam to the people under Naqshbandi,

Qadiriyya, Kubreviyya, Mawlawiyya, and Bektashism sects and ensured the Islamization of the Turks to a large extent.

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