

**A PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACH TO REMAININGS OF
THE TRADITIONAL TURKIC ASPECTS IN THE POPULAR LIFE
CONCERNING DEATH CUSTOMS IN MODERN DAY TURKEY**

***GÜNÜMÜZ TÜRKİYESİNDE ÖLÜMLE İLGİLİ GELENEKLERDEKİ
GELENEKSEL TÜRK İNANÇ VE UYGULAMALARINA
FENOMENOLOJİK YAKLAŞIM***

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Özet

Türkiye’de Müslümanlar, bir takım inanç ve uygulamaları günlük hayatlarında ortaya koymaktadır. Evrensel dinlerin hoşgörüsü dahilinde yaşatılan bu olgular, Kitabi İslam’ın temsilcilerinin “din dışı”, “hurafe”, “batıl” gibi değerlendirmeleri sonucunda dışlanmaya çalışılmaktadır. Ancak değişik zaman ve coğrafyadan geçerek günümüze ulaşan bir çok halk inançları, evrensel dinlerin “başka kültürel olguları kendi içinde hazmedebilme özelliğine” en geniş bir biçimde sahip olan İslam’ın içinde, başka coğrafyalarda olduğu gibi Türkiye’de de yaygın olarak yaşadığı gözlemlenmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Resmi/Kitabi Din, Halk inançları, Bid’at, Hurafe, Batıl

Abstract

In Turkey, The Muslims believe and perform some kind of popular beliefs and practices. These phenomena are being rejected as ‘superstitious’ and ‘false’ or ‘pernicious innovations’ by the representatives of official Islam. However, it is observed that popular beliefs and practices are commonly being lived in Turkey, as in other Muslim societies, regarding to tolerance of universal religions as “uniforming other or different religious phenomena”

Key Words: Official beliefs, popular beliefs, superstitions, false, pernicious innovations, rites, rituals.

Introduction

People in Turkey, though they are mostly Muslim, believe and practise some quasi-religious elements which come down from the traditional pre-Islamic Turkic life. These phenomena intensively occupy and effect modern people’s daily life. People consider them as Islamic, while the *official* Islam prohibits and regard them as ‘superstitious’ and ‘false’ or ‘pernicious innovations’, and the Department of Religious Affairs of the State try to inform people about this by publishing

books and leaflets, and by organising meetings at which provincial *muftis* discuss these matters.

These superstitions are related to;

a) portents of death concerning animals, dreams, trees, psychological and physiological signs in association with the sick person, necromantic and astrological events,

b) the prevention rites from these portents of someone's death,

c) grave veneration and saint cult.

In this article we will examine them from the point of the pre-Islamic traditional Turkic aspects. In case of necessity, we also will point out the Islamic contexts.

1- Superstitions Related to Animals

The relation of animals to the death of someone occupies a significant place in popular beliefs. This belief is interpreted according to the movement, voice or the flying of animals. These animals can be categorised as below:

Dog and jackal: The domesticated animal which gives the clearest portents of death is the dog, depending upon its place and time of howling, and its direction. If a dog howls bitterly, often and continuously at night near a house or in front of a door, or lifts its head to the sky during howling or in the street, then according to popular belief this indicates the forthcoming death of a relative.

In order to prevent the forthcoming bad portent, the dog is pelted with stones, given food or sworn at as in 'down with you'.¹

If a jackal howls at night seven times, this is also believed to be an indication of the forthcoming death of someone.

This belief might be connected with the cultural structure of the Turkic people in which the relation between the Turkic tribes in pre-Islamic times and animals was very strong.

¹ Sedat Veyis Örnek, *Anadolu Folklorunda Ölüm*, Ankara, 1971, pp. 16-17; Kemal Erdil, *Yaşayan Hurafeler*, Ankara, 1991, p. 98.

While cultural² and literal³ references prove the importance of animals in the life of Turkic people, the idea of animals as portents of death is not explicit in the pre-Islamic sources, as is observed in modern day Turkey. The closest parallel perhaps to the present day superstitions in Turkey and also in other Turkic countries, is the story which was told by Juvaini. According to his report, the Uy-gur people moved when they heard the neighing of horses, the screaming of camels, the barking and howling of the dogs and beasts of prey, the lowing of cattle, the bleating of sheep, the twittering of birds and the whimpering of children. At this instant, when they heard the cry of "Köç, köç!", meaning escape, they would move on from their halting place.⁴

These examples from literature known in the past illustrate the importance of animals in Turkic beliefs. This has continued to the present in the context of portents of death, as we will now show on the basis of the material collected from our Turkish sources.

Although the dog is considered degrading in the Altai and Siberian myths because of its help to Satan and its ignorance of holy responsibility given by God, *Tengri*, it is at the same time regarded as a portent of death in their myths as it is by the present day people of Turkey. For the pre-Islamic Turkic people (also for the

² The cultural traces of the animals are obviously seen in the understanding of tribal symbols of Turkic people. Every tribe had its own tribal symbol or *tamga* which were beasts and birds. These animals were oxen, deers, horses, wolves, sheep or rams, snakes and wild birds. People took distinguishing characteristics of the animals, such as a fox, a lion, a wolf, an eagle, etc. No member of a tribe was to hunt, kill, disturb or swear at a *tamga* or it would curse him to death. These animals were regarded not as gods but as tribal symbols with some sacred element. J. Paul Roux, *Türklerin ve Moğolların Eski Dini*, Istanbul, 1994, pp. 174-180 and also in French, *La Religion Des Turcs et Des Mongols*, Paris, 1984; T. Gülensoy, *Orhun'dan Anadolu'ya Türk Damgaları*, Istanbul, 1989, pp. 20-44. So the portents of animals indicating the death may have been derived from these *tamga* animals and birds, however they can be discussed from different aspects.

³ There are references in a script discovered in the last century in a Turkic town in China, written in Gök Turk characters with some Chinese writings by an unknown Turkic Buddhist priest. It is entitled *Irk Bitig*, Book of Fortune-telling. This book is about chance game or a kind of bibliomancy, in which the place referred to is determined by the number on a dice when thrown three times. Although it describes the badness or goodness of animals and birds with regard to their movements, it is not connected to the superstitions in our work, because the goodness or badness of any animal or bird was determined by fictitious, didactic, heroic and philosophical connections in the style of fable stories. Nevertheless, the animals in our work and in this book are almost the same, namely, a grey horse, falcon, camel, eagle with golden wings, colt with golden shoes, tiger, yellow horse, wolf, deer (good), serpent with golden head, bear and pig (bad); H. Namık Orkun, *Eski Türk Yazıtları*, Ankara, 1987, pp. 263-285.

⁴ 'Ala-ad-Din 'Ata-Malik al-Juvaini, *The History of the World-Conqueror*, by J. A. Boyle from the text of Mirza Muhammad Qazvini, vol. 1, Manchester, 1968, pp. 61, 231f.

present day Altai Turks), the soul only exists in humans and animals. It leaves the body, temporarily, to wander in the mountains and forests. When it wanders some mystic person, or *köspökci*, and a dog are able to see or realise its direction. When it goes towards another body instead of its own, it means the other person will die; in this way the howling of dogs warns of the death of a person.⁵ This character of the dog was transferred to its continued barking or howling at certain times and places in the case of Turkey.

Sheep, goat, cow and ox: These animals are also regarded as bad omens which indicate the death of a person if they bellow when they see their owner. In order to prevent its bad portent one pats the hair of the animal, or hits it with a stick.⁶ We however, do not find any trace about their ominousness from the pre-Islamic milieu.

Wolf and Horse: If the horse paws the ground or neighs or cries at a house where there is a sick person, and the wolf howls at night, it is believed that it warns of the death of someone in that area or specific place.

While there are no direct statements about these animals in the early Turkish literature, we can consider their indications in line with the Turkic beliefs. According to the ancient Turkic beliefs, these animals with blue manes are heavenly creatures which warn the public of disaster, maintain or safeguard people, and also take the righteous person to God, *Tengri*. They are friends of the Turkic nations and take them to the god of the nation, *Tengri*, after death.⁷

The howling motifs above as warning of death may also be related to the pre-Islamic lamentation ceremonies in which the lamenters wept and sang dirges for the deceased sounding like the howling of a wolf, as was expressed, for example, in the eulogy for a Turkish hero Alp Er Tunga ‘Has Alp Er Tunga died?, The heroes are howling wolf-like...’⁸

The horse of superstition can be paralleled to the Islamic symbol of the horse as a vehicle of ascension to Allah. When the Prophet Muhammad ascended to the seventh heaven (*al-Mi'râj*), he was taken on an animal called *al-Buraq*⁹ which is, according to some interpreters, a kind of horse and will be the first beast

⁵ A. V. Anohin, ‘Materiali po samanstvu u Alteytsev’, *Publications du Musee d’Anthropologie et d’Ethnologie de l’Academie des Sciences de Russie*, 4/2, 1924 (in Russian) and in A. Inan, *Makaleler ve Incelemeler*, 1, Ankara, 1987 (in Turkish), pp. 404-453; Bahattin Ögel, *Türk Mitolojisi*, Ankara, 1971, p. 481.

⁶ Örnek (1971), p. 17; Erdil (1991), p. 99.

⁷ Ögel (1971), pp. 313, 314.

⁸ Kaşgarlı Mahmud, *Divan-ü Lügat-it-Türk Tercemesi*, Ankara, 1939, pp. 41-42, 160, 188, 189.

⁹ Qur’an, 53:12.

raised on the day of resurrection to serve the Prophet Muhammad.¹⁰ Here it symbolises the means of carrying a friend of Allah to Allah and to serve him whether in the world or in the hereafter. The symbol of the horse as a warning of death in the popular Turkish belief may be a reflection of this Islamic horse symbolising the after life in heaven.

Stork: If a stork is seen carrying a piece of black or white cloth in spring for its nest, it is believed to be an unlucky portent indicating the death of somebody in that area. In Western Turkey, it is believed that if a stork brings a red cloth most of the elderly in the area will die. However, if it brings a white cloth it means that young girls will be married.

Among the Hun Turks, the stork flying out of a city was considered a good omen if the city in question was under siege and about to be captured. On the other hand, its flying into a certain city under siege was considered a bad omen, indicating that the city's defeat was imminent. Contrary to this, in Turkey a stork carrying a white or black piece of cloth, symbols of good fortune and mourning, is considered symbolic of a good or bad omen. Although there is no reliable evidence which relates to this superstition, the beliefs of the Huns might be the precursor of this belief.

For the Huns, the falcon also was regarded as a bird of death, but it has no significance as a portent of death in Turkey.¹¹

Cock and hen; If a cock crows at noon, in the evening or at night, according to superstition this indicates the forthcoming death of someone. If an egg-laying hen clucks, somebody in that house will die soon. In order to stop this from happening, they are killed.

Fox: The unfamiliar howling of this wild animal is also associated with a bad omen. In order to prevent any misfortune befalling, shoes should be reversed, up side down or vice-versa.

As a portent of forthcoming the death observed among the popular beliefs, the symbol of the fox has the same characteristic in the myths of the Yakut Turks in Siberia and Khitai Turks in China. In their myths, foxes bring spiritual enrichment to kings. It is believed that whenever it dies, a king will die as well.¹²

Owl: One of the most ill-omened animals is the owl. According to popular belief, as the owl makes its nest in ruined places, and its face is unsympathetic it is regarded as an unlucky portent because of its bitter, long and insistent hooting or

¹⁰ Muhammad Muhsin Khan, *The Translation of the Meanings of Sahih al-Bukhari (Arabic-English)*, Gujranwala, 1971, vol. 4, p. 225 (henceforth it will be referred as Bukhari); Jane Idleman Smith & Y. Yazbeck Haddad, *The Islamic Understanding of Death and Resurrection*, Albany, 1981, pp. 10, 73-74.

¹¹ Roux (1994), p. 172; Gülensoy (1989), p. 39.

¹² Ögel (1971), pp. 50, 560.

howling-like sound produced at night or at dusk, perching on a roof or in front of a window. In order to prevent its bad portent, a large onion is chopped up and thrown towards the bird.¹³

The owl also appears in curses in Turkey. One of them is "*Ocağına Baykuşlar tünese,*" means "May owls perch on your hearth!" bringing death.¹⁴

As can be seen in many cultures all over the world, the owl in Turkey is regarded as a bad-omen signifying the impending death of someone. In Turkic belief, we have not come across such beliefs beyond the tribal symbols of the Bayat tribe. It is however most probably borrowed from the Iranian or Chinese beliefs which consider the owl as a portent of individual death, and become influential upon the Turkish culture in many cases.¹⁵

Eagle: The eagle is also regarded as a bad omen, warning of the forthcoming death of someone, by perching in front of the house, on a roof or in the garden and calling continuously. If it flies from a certain house towards the graveyard, it is believed that a person will die in that house. According to popular belief, the reason for its being considered an unlucky omen is that it is a wild bird.

Although it is not directly related to the present day belief, we can conjecture this from its character in the Turkic myths. In the Yakut myth, the raven or eagle came into existence from a piece of the heart of the angel of hell, *Buura Dohsun* whose body was chopped into pieces by the hero *Er Sogotoh* to protect people from its brutality, but from a piece of his heart a black raven or eagle took to the sky. Therefore, it has been cursed as an ill-omened bird as the enemy of the life of people.¹⁶ Similar motif is also seen in the Manas epic.¹⁷

2- Superstitions Related to Dreams

Numerous dreams are thought to indicate death. We can classify them according to the interpretations of implements, animals, plants etc. as below:

Trees, fruits and vegetables: The appearance of the following in dreams warn of the impending death of someone, such as, the falling down of a tree, the breaking of a young tree, to eat fresh grapes, black grapes, to eat or have yellow fruits, unseasonable fruit or vegetable, etc.

¹³ Erdil (1991), p. 98

¹⁴ Here, the domestic hearth symbolises the family and lineage. Paul J. Magnarella, 'folk Customs in the Traditional Turkish Home: Their Meaning and Function', *II. Milletlerarası Türk Folklor Kongresi Bildirileri*, 4. Ankara, 1982, pp. 329-339; Roux (1994), p. 187.

¹⁵ Virginia C. Holmgren, *Owls in Folklore and Natural History*, California, 1988, pp. 46f.

¹⁶ Ögel (1971), p. 106.

¹⁷ Ögel (1971), pp. 546f.

Dreaming of trees is regarded as an indication of death in various parts of Turkey, e.g. to sleep under a walnut tree, an unexpected abundance of cherry fruit, to break a branch of a tree that grows over a grave, as these trees are supposedly praying for the dead person and protecting its soul.

Teeth: Dreams of these indicate the death of a close person. The last dream is warning of the death of an elderly acquaintance: Loss, breakage or extraction of teeth, extraction of teeth without pain, extraction of teeth with pain, loss of a molar tooth.¹⁸

Animals: To have a dream about dog bite, snakebite, black snake, bay horse, grey horse,¹⁹ camel, cutting of a horse's tail, buffalo warns of the death of someone.²⁰

Person: To have dreams of a dead person who calls to the dreamer²¹, takes the dreamer somewhere, gives the Qur'an to someone calling his/her name, asks for some food from the dreamer, a naked person are also regarded as an indication of the death of a certain person.²²

Miscellaneous: To have dreams of fire, smoke, a black thread, a boiler, a collapsing wall or house, the post of a house collapsing, muddy water, meat hanging in a butcher's shop, a wedding procession, a single woman who gives birth, a crowd in front of a house, a crying baby, wearing wedding dress, are all indications of a forthcoming death.²³

Interpretation of elements or symbols in dreams with regard to the death of someone occupies an important place in popular beliefs in Turkey. We are unable to discuss the matter by comparison with pre-Islamic examples, because we have not come across superstitions related to dreams portending the death of someone from pre-Islamic times, and the only interpretation known are those given to kings and leaders, that the appearance of sword, arrows, thunder and so on in their dreams means victory in battle and extension of their domains.²⁴

However, later on, with the conversion of the Turks to Islam, as far as we are aware, they started to interpret dreams as indicative of impending death according to the Islamic elements.²⁵ The Eastern Turks also discussed

¹⁸ Örnek (1971), pp. 25-27.

¹⁹ Hayri Başbuğ, *Aşiretlerimizde At Kültürü*, İstanbul, 1986, p. 36.

²⁰ Örnek (1971), pp. 27-28.

²¹ Nevzat Gözaydın, 'Ölü ve Ölümle İlgili Anlatılar Kataloğu Üzerine', *Türk Folklor Araştırmaları*, Ankara, 1984, pp. 97-120.

²² M. Yardımcı, 'Çukurova'da Halk İnanmaları ve Geleneksel İyileştirme Yöntemleri ile İlgili Uygulamalar', *Halkbilim ve Edebiyat Yazıları*, Malatya, 1993, pp. 331-332.

²³ Örnek (1971), pp. 28-30.

²⁴ Roux (1994), p. 73.

²⁵ Roux (1994), p. 73; K. Yüce, *Saltukname'de Tarihi ve Efsanevi Unsurlar*, Ankara, 1987, pp. 134-137, 258.

oneirocriticism in their books. One of the earliest Turko-Islamic sources, *Kutadgu Bilig* which was written in 1069 CE in Kashgar by Yusuf Khas Hacib in the realm of the Karakhanids, contains dream interpretations.²⁶ He says that oneirocritics at that time were ranked in the thirteen social classes. The dream interpreter deciphers the meaning of dreams. If he interprets skilfully, the dream comes out well and the dreamer is pleased. If the dream is unseemly and bad, the dreamer must protect himself from its badness by giving alms to the poor. According to him, there are good and bad dreams. To consume bad food or drink²⁷ causes one to have bad dreams. He also classifies the dreams with regard to the seasons of the year, for example to dream of red and black in spring is interpreted as strength of blood and the dreamer should bleed a little blood. Yellow, pink or orange colours in summer, black, a mountain, pit or hollow in autumn, running water, ice, snow or hail in winter mean trouble. A sad dream means that the dreamer will experience happiness, if it is happy the dreamer will endure sorrow and cry. A ladder means the whole life of a person, or the top of a ladder the end of life. To drink a cup of water means completion of one's life, to drink half of the water means that half of the life remains. A horse or horseman means the angel of death.²⁸

It seems to us that the interpretation of the dreams as an indication of impending death has been influenced by the Islamic dream interpretation. In the Islamic vision, dreams and their interpretations occupy an important place. Dreams are divided into three types, the first one the dreams of the prophets which are always true, as declared in the Qur'an, in the Chapters of Sura-Yusuf (12: 4-6) and Sura-al-Saffat (37: 102-105). The second type of dream, those of pious persons, are regarded as four-fifths (that is 80%) part of prophecy. That is, they represent in general the truth, though they are not as reliable as those of prophets. According to the tradition, any true dream is from Allah and such dreams should be narrated to others. In contrast, a bad dream is from Satan and whoever has such a dream should seek refuge with Allah, and should not mention it to anybody.²⁹ The third type is ordinary dreams which are the expression of the suppressed carnal desires of a person. However, these dreams may represent a true omen in the form of colour, trees, fruit, animals, etc.³⁰

The Apostle Muhammad interpreted his dreams and those his companions. For example, he interpreted milk as religious knowledge,³¹ a shirt as religion,³² a

²⁶ Robert Devereux, 'Yusuf Khass Khajib and the *Kutadgu Bilig*', *Muslim World*, 51/4, 1961, pp. 299-310.

²⁷ Although the author notice the bad and good food, he does not explain what they are.

²⁸ Yusuf Has Hacib, *Kutadgu Bilig*, ed. By B. Atalay, Ankara, 1974, p. 316 (lines: 4366-4373), pp. 429-435 (lines: 5993-6086); R. Devereux, 'Oneirocriticism in Eleventh Century Central Asia', *Central Asiatic Journal*, 12, 1968, pp. 92-95.

²⁹ Bukhari (1971), vol. 9, pp. 94-96.

³⁰ Umar Azam, *Dreams in Islam*, Pennsylvania, 1992, pp. 11-25.

³¹ Bukhari (1971), vol. 9, p. 112.

³² Bukhari (1971), vol. 9, pp. 113, 114.

garden or the colour green is death and consequently heaven.³³ A key is the symbol of new or secret knowledge,³⁴ flying is the symbol of righteousness, a flowing spring is a heavenly reward,³⁵ while a palace is the place of righteous persons in heaven,³⁶ cows being slaughtered is a symbol of the believers who were martyred,³⁷ a black woman is a symbol of an epidemic and a broken sword is a disaster.³⁸ In Islamic interpretations, trees indicate the hereafter, and consequently the death of someone. Trees and fruit are mostly the symbol of heaven.³⁹

As can be observed, although our statements do not contain exactly the same elements as the interpretations of the Prophet, the idea and essence of some motifs are similar, such as the falling of a tree, fruit and vegetables, horse, camel, ox, snake, book, fire, to be called by a dead person and so on. At this instant, we can say that with the conversion to Islam, the Turks adopted this system of interpretation and they enriched the elements around them in the same way.

3- Miscellaneous: People also believe in other superstitions,⁴⁰ but because of their non-popularity among the people, and their lack of importance in the scope of our studies we shall not discuss them here.

³³ Bukhari (1971), vol. 9, pp. 115, 117.

³⁴ Bukhari, (1971),vol. 9, p. 116.

³⁵ Bukhari (1971), vol. 9, pp. 118-120.

³⁶ Bukhari (1971), vol. 9, pp. 123-125.

³⁷ Bukhari (1971), vol. 9, p. 131.

³⁸ Bukhari (1971), vol. 9, pp. 132-142.

³⁹ Azam (1992), p. 38.

⁴⁰ These are superstitions related to psychological and physiological signs of a sick person (such as giving bequests or last advice, the desire to stand up by the person in question, to ask about death, to wish relatives to pay his/her debts, to ask for an *imam* or a Qur'an reader, the desire to see relatives who are far away, staring at the roof, mentioning paradise, cooling of the body, shivering, odour, flaring of the nostrils, etc (Örnek (1971), pp. 30-34; Y. Kalafat, *Doğu Anadolu'da Eski Türk İnançlarının İzleri*, Ankara, 1990, pp. 108-109.) These indications of death are fixed in the minds of the people as a consequence of their long experience and are carried as a cultural heritage; Necromantic Symptoms (such as to urinate towards the *Qibla* or praying direction, brings death to a certain person, when a coffin is shaken or moved when it is carried, not to drink water in the area where death occurred until the corpse is buried, as the angel of death, *Azra'el*, has put its sword in water here. Those who drink here die if the corpse is soft, another person from the relatives will die soon, if the corpse is too heavy, it is believed that s/he was wicked or is worthy of hell, if the corpse seems to be smiling, it is destined for heaven, the mattress of a deathbed should be folded head first, not foot first. Not to do so brings another death of someone in the family (Erdil (1991), p. 19; B. Oğuz, *Türkiye Halkının Kültür Kökenleri*, 2, İstanbul, 1980, p. 116.; Örnek (1971) p. 36; Magnarella p. 336.) and astrological indications.

4- Superstitions Related to Disposal of the Corpse

If somebody is very ill and his death is imminent, close relatives and friends living nearby gather in his/her house. A *hoca* or *imam* is called to recite the Qur'an, particularly *Sura al-Yasin* over the gravely ill. The recitation of the Qur'an is, in general, continued until the death occurs. If there is no imam an ordinary person tries to have the fatally ill person repeat the *shahâda* or the Islamic testimony "I testify that there is no god but Allah. And that Muhammad is the Apostle of Allah."

When death occurs, the jaw of the dead is bound up with a piece of fabric. This is to prevent either the water leaking out when it is washed, the penetration of Satan into the body, or the appearance of deformity so as not to give 'evidence' to Satan.⁴¹ The eyes are also bound so as to stop the penetration of Satan into the body, to prevent the deceased's ugly appearance, so as not call another person with him/her, to prevent longing for the bereaved, and so as not to go to the grave with open eyes. All the clothes of the deceased are replaced with new ones so as to remove the soul from the clothes or body. At the same time, women assemble the belongings of the dead person and lament around them.

People apply some prevention rites pertaining to implements used in the disposal of the dead in order to stop the work of the angel of death, *Azra'el*, around the house. These rites are as follows,

- all water containers are emptied in seven houses, and inverted,
- all dishes of meal are emptied,
- sleeping neighbours around the house are awakened while the corpse is being washed,
- water is poured behind the funeral procession,
- the deathbed is removed and a stone is placed there,
- earthenware used for boiling the water is inverted,
- fire is extinguished and ash is removed from the hearth,
- all participants in the funeral procession should wash their hands and faces after the disposal of the dead body. Before this act they should not do anything, otherwise they would be visited by the angel of death,
- implements used in the funeral should not be handed over to another person, or death may follow.⁴²

⁴¹ Örnek (1971), p. 45; R. Yetişen, *Tahtacı Aşiretleri*, İzmir, 1986, p. 50; Ali Selçuk, *Tahtacılar*, İst., p. 202.

⁴² Kalafat (1990), pp. 107-109.

After the purification and shrouding of the corpse the rest of the implements should be removed from that place, otherwise other members of the family will die.

We can easily see the strong influence of Islam throughout the process starting from the offering of *du'as* over the gravely ill person by reciting from the Qur'an, particularly *Sura al-Yasin*.⁴³ Similarly, most of the preparations for the disposal of the dead follow Islamic rules. All compulsory and optional, *farz and sünnet*, ceremonies (purification, shrouding, the funeral prayer, burial ceremony and talqîn or inculcation) are performed with regard to the Islamic regulations.

However, the influence of the Turkic religion is also seen in some cases during the disposal ceremonies, for example burning fire or incense in the room or over the grave. This is a custom from the Turkic religion. Pre-Islamic Turkic people lit a fire after the burial ceremony around the grave or at home in order to prevent haunting by the souls of others. Present day Yakut and Teleut Turks who are still adherents of Turkic religion, retain this custom around the grave to prevent the haunting of the spirit.⁴⁴ The Turks in Greece also celebrate this rite to stop the horrific consequences to the soul. Rather, when they feel the danger of the soul they take out the corpse from its grave and cremate it in an open area with a great celebration.⁴⁵ To cover the eyes of the newly dead person with a piece of leather is also observed among the non-Muslim Turks in Siberia. According to their beliefs, a dead person is able to see around him/her and if they do not close the eyes, the dead person calls and takes someone it knows.⁴⁶

In remote places some communities rarely bury the personal remains, valuables and a horse with the deceased indicating the wealth and social credit of a certain person. They also take the bed, pillow and quilt to the grave in winter and place them around it.⁴⁷ Women are buried with their own wedding dresses, rings, ear rings and other valuables. In some places, coins are scattered onto the grave. The Alavite communities decorate the graves with flowers, vases and glasses. They even build a hearth for the dead person so as to make coffee.⁴⁸ This behaviour is one of the survivals of the pre-Islamic funeral customs. In the pre-Islamic Turkic funeral ceremonies, the bereaved collected all armour and other instruments of the dead person and meat of a sacrificed animal under a tent, and sang eulogies. Then some of these implements and the best horse were buried with the corpse whilst the rest of them were distributed.⁴⁹ It seems apparent that, in the Islamic period, the

⁴³ Bukhari (1971), vol. 2, p. 187.

⁴⁴ Kalafat (1990), p.61.

⁴⁵ A. Dede, 'Bati Trakya Türklerinde Eski Türk Dini Şamanizmden Kalıntılar', *II. Milletlerarası Türk Folklor Kongresi Bildirileri*, 4, Ankara, 1982, pp. 93-108.

⁴⁶ Kalafat (1990), p. 61.

⁴⁷ Kalafat (1990), p. 107.

⁴⁸ Örnek (1971), pp. 72-74.

⁴⁹ Sergei I. Rudenko, *Frozen Tombs of Siberia, the Pazyryk Burials of Iron Age Horsemen*, tr. M. W. Thompson, London, 1970, pp. 284, 287.

ritual of disposing of the personal property of the dead person by burying it with the corpse as in the pre-Islamic times, in order to dampen the grief or to forget the bitterness of death, was replaced with the donation of the possessions to the poor, or less commonly by cremating them. In the same sense, in the *türbes* or tombs of the pious, the prayer rug of the person was laid down as a personal possession of the deceased. This custom may have been the islamized form of the pre-Islamic custom of burying the personal belongings of the dead person.

However, due to reduced wealth in our own time, the burial of a horse has been discontinued and instead, a horse is decorated with the valuables of the deceased, and is driven in front of the funeral procession to the grave. Alternatively, the coffin is decorated with light and rich belongings of the dead person, and taken to the grave. They are not buried with him but after the burial ceremony distributed to poor.⁵⁰

One of the traditional Turkic practices was to place a mirror on the grave symbolising the moon or sun as a reflection of god, *Tengri*. With this act people believed that the dead would be with Tengri, in the hereafter. Such mirrors were discovered in barrows belonging to the ancient Turks in Central Asia.⁵¹ Present day Turks in Turkey still place mirrors over the grave as a symbol of brightness. Although people do not connect the brightness to God, and do not know the essence of this belief, it is clearly a legacy of the previous culture and religion.⁵²

We do not know about the origin of the usage of the incense which is burnt over the corpse or coffin, in front of the funeral procession or over the grave to remove Satan or to let the angels come. This could be a reflection of the recommendation of the Apostle Muhammad to use *kafur*, *hunut* and *sidr* in the ritual water to give it a pleasant aroma,⁵³ although there are other possibilities arising from pre-Islamic Turkic tradition: To keep a fire at home after a death was a custom in the Turkic religion where people lit a fire after the burial ceremony around the grave or at home in order to stop prevent the deceased haunting the living. Present day Yakut Turks still adhering to the traditional Turkic religion perform this rite for the same purpose. Incense burners and their motifs mounted on altars were discovered in Pazyryk barrows.⁵⁴ In Turkey, to burn fire at home or over the grave is also carried out with the same understanding.⁵⁵

⁵⁰ M. Turan, 'Kars'ta Ölü ile İlgili Gelenekler', *II. Milletlerarası Türk Folklor Kongresi Bildirileri*, 4, Ankara, 1982, pp. 547-557.

⁵¹ Easher Jacobson, *The Arts of the Scythians, the Interpretation of Cultures at the Edge of the Hellenic World*, Leiden, 1995, pp. 182-187; B. Ögel, *İslamiyetten Önce Türk Kültür Tarihi*, Ankara, 1988, pp. 24, 34, 35, 147, 205, 232.

⁵² Kalafat (1990), pp. 106, 109.

⁵³ Bukhari (1971), vol. 2, pp. 194, 196, 200-201.

⁵⁴ Rudenko (1970), pp. 295-297; Kalafat (1990), p. 61.

⁵⁵ Turan (1982), p. 551.

5- Post-Burial Ceremonies

We can also observe some traditional remains in the islamised forms during the post-burial commemoration ceremonies. Post-burial ceremonies consist of certain commemorative occasions which are mainly called the First Friday or the First Week, the Fortieth Day of the Dead, the Fifty-Second Day of the Dead, the First Festival of the Dead⁵⁶, and the Anniversary of the Dead in which the bereaved, in general, cease mourning the morning after venerating the grave. Beyond these ceremonies, people organise additional ceremonies if one of the bereaved dreams of the deceased, whether it is good or horrific.

Mourning and Lamentation, mourning by screaming, slapping and cutting the body, as a tradition of *Jahiliyya* or Ignorant Times, is prohibited by the Apostle Muhammad in Islamic funeral rituals. However, although the Turks in Turkey are Muslims; and have lived under Islamic rule for centuries they retain their pre-Islamic lamentations and mourning ceremonies as a significant part of their funeral ritual. This custom seems to have persisted throughout the Seljuk and Ottoman periods down to our own time.

Some characteristic examples from the Seljuki time: to tear clothes, to mourn for seven days, to weep and lament⁵⁷, to cut hair, to slash the face, to slap the face and chest, to wear white (for the palace staff) or black (for ordinary people)⁵⁸ to commit suicide (though rarely)⁵⁹, to untie hair, to grieve sorrowfully, to put black cloths on their horses and to cut the mane hair and tails of the horses,

⁵⁶ This is one of the common Islamic festivals, *'Yd al- Ramadan*, or *'Yd al-Adha* or *Kurban*, which comes after the death of the deceased. The first festival after the death is dedicated to the deceased, called *yas bayrami*, which means mourning festival; or *kederli bayram*, which means sorrowful festival; or *acili bayram*, which means sad festival; and *kara bayram*, which means unlucky or black festival; Kalafat (1990), p. 114.

⁵⁷ Ismail Görkem, 'Türk Dünyasında Yas Törenleri ve Ağıtlar', *Türk Dünyası Araştırmaları*, 1992/7, pp.157-188; For example "O! My son, Davud! I have gone hunting without you. Your absence, your being far away from me, has caused me to weep very tragically. I cannot sleep a wink at night. My life is very sorrowful. Tell me how your life is? What has death done to you? Have worms and earth changed your face and eyes? Are you, too, grieved and sorrowful like me? Oh! My poor missing one. Alas!"; Ahmed b. Mahmud (1977), vol. 1, p. 140

⁵⁸ Görkem (1992), p. 169.

⁵⁹ After the death of one of the Hun Kings, Shih Hu in 349 CE., his heirs and commanders slaughtered each other, and their offspring among the Mongolian Turks committed a similar act. Tuluy Khan, a Turkish ruler under the Mongolian Empire sacrificed himself to the spirits as a ransom for his brother Uguday: W. Barthold, *Turkestan Down to Mongol Invasion*, tr. V. Minorsky, London, 1977, p. 52; Rene Grousset, *The Empire of the Steppes, A History of Central Asia*, tr. N. Walford, New Jersey, 1970, p.58.

to turn the saddles upside down, to throw away hats and smear earth on one's face.⁶⁰

Some characteristic examples from the Ottomans: to cut off the tail of the horse, to reverse the saddles face down, to lay armour upon the coffin,⁶¹ to cut hair, to slash faces and breasts till they stream with blood, to wear white funeral dress as a sign of mourning,⁶² to throw coins from the funeral procession towards people and over the tomb which symbolises the wealth of the dead, and closeness to folk.⁶³

In the present time, lamentation plays an important place in the post burial ceremonies starting soon after the coffin is taken from house. Lamentation rites are regarded as quasi-religious acts. The most lamentable cries are uttered by the women and the participation of the men is not welcomed. The women gather in a place around the remains of the deceased. They start to sing eulogies by remembering the good deeds of the departed, as was done in the pre-Islamic times. The difference between the pre-Islamic and present day lamentation is the roles of the persons. While the men sung eulogies in pre-Islamic ceremonies, these are now offered by the women. The reason could be the new out-door role of men in their capacity as bread winners of the family, and the need to remain. If so, this shows the influence of Islam.

Eulogies are commonly extemporised by remembering the works or deeds of the deceased, how and what s/he would have been successful at if s/he had not died. Sometimes the lamenters weep and sing as though they are speaking to the deceased, as if s/he was alive. In addition, they show their sorrow when they hear the news of a death. At the same time, they slash and slap their faces horrifically and cut their hair. Dirges are sung by the women or lamenters called *agici* or *agitci* or *bayatici*. The latter are competent at singing dramatic eulogies. They are invited to sing rhythmic dirges behind the deceased recounting his/her good characteristics. For this act they are occasionally paid.⁶⁴

Sometimes eulogies are composed as though the deceased says it by mentioning the names of the bereaved; All these features are seen in these example eulogies below.

Tell my wife to go on mourning.
Do not reproach Ahmed and Halis,

⁶⁰ A. b. Mahmud (1977), vol. 1, p. 140.

⁶¹ At the funerals of Fatih Mehmed II (22 May 1453), Sultan Selim and Suleyman the Magnificent; Görkem pp. 170-171.

⁶² Buharalı, p. 154; Edmund Spencer, *Travels in European Turkey*, London, 1853, p. 353.

⁶³ Esad Efendi, *Teşrifat-ı Kadime (1700-1800)*, Istanbul, 1979, pp. 108- 110; J. Herbert, *An Introduction to Asia*, London, 1965, p. 67.

⁶⁴ Turan (1982), p. 550.

My daughters Azize and Gullizar are now fatherless,
And my small children sit sad.

Mourner:

-What are you, poor owl, doing here?
Have not your own land? Where is your country?
You did not accept my greetings, are you offended at me?
Where is your lovely tongue?
My uncle's daughter!
Open the door and let me in.
Are you sick? Let me ask how you are.
If you are thirsty, I will give water.
Where is your spring-time gushing?

The deceased:

-I am not offended at you, my cousin.
Death has stopped my tongue.
I cannot stand,
I am so tired.
My mother has made me a bird to fly;
Do not wait, she said.
Damn my fate which has made me suffer so much.
I am mourned over. My colourful days are gone.⁶⁵

This is repeated in all commemoration ceremonies, by the visitors at the home of the bereaved and during veneration of the grave.

This is characteristic of pre-Islamic Turkic behaviour in the funeral ceremonies. At that time, people collected all the armour of the deceased in a tent, and they remembered his heroic works by singing eulogies. At the same time, horse riders rode horses around the tent seven or nine times. At each circuit, at the entrance of the tent they cut their faces. As in the funeral of the King of the Huns, Attila (in the fifth c.),⁶⁶ Kül Tegin (in the sixth c.)⁶⁷ and Jawanshir (in the seventh c.).⁶⁸

In spite of the prohibition of the Prophet Muhammad as traditions of the Ignorant Ages, such acts are still seen in the Islamic Turkish funerals, too.

⁶⁵ Turan, (1982), pp. 551-554.

⁶⁶ E. A. Thompson, *A History of Attila and the Huns*, Oxford, 1948, pp. 149-150; J. Otto Maenchen-Helfen, *The World of the Huns, Studies in Their History and Culture*, London, 1973, pp. 275, 276.

⁶⁷ V. Thomsen, 'The Orkhon Inscriptions' tr. by E. D. Ross, *BSOAS*, 5, 1928-30, pp. 861-876; A. Inan, *Tarihte ve Bugün Şamanizm*, Ankara, 1986, pp. 177-178.

⁶⁸ Mireli Seyidov, *Azerbaycan Xalqının Soykökünü Düşünürken*, Baki, 1989, p. 43.

The singing of dirges for the deceased was the focus of the ceremony and was a crucial custom in pre-Islamic Turkic religion. In the funerals of the *kagans*, various kings or representatives of different countries participated. They even brought their lamenters with them to sing eulogies and dirges for the dead person. All native weepers and singers sung eulogies or dirges for the dead person, remembering his good work or heroic deeds. Lamentations were to some extent a kind of theatrical show, or animation of the life of the hero. At the same time, actors rode horses and fought or hunted so as to animate the life of the hero with the accompaniment of musical instruments.

Present day mourning ceremonies are carried on by singing eulogies and dirges. Playing the musical instrument has been discontinued because of the influence of the dominant *Sunni* belief. Animation of the life of the deceased by the actors has also been forgotten. Three to four decades ago, in the southern provinces people used to celebrate the mourning ceremony by decorating a tree stump with the clothes of the deceased, and dancing to the accompaniment of drums and reed pipe.⁶⁹ This rite seems to have been discontinued in recent years. However, in the funerals of the *Alavite* community, people have a kind of entertainment around the grave after the burial ceremony. So to speak, the cemeteries are their meeting-places as a survival of the pre-Islamic Turkic tradition. The whirling prayer of the *Mevlevi Sufi Order*, by playing musical instruments around the tomb of Mevlana Jalal al-Din al-Rumi (d.1273 CE) in Konya, might be a reflection of the Turkic religious funeral ceremony.⁷⁰ In addition, we can say that present day elegies or *ilahis* and *mevlid*⁷¹ sung in rhythm but without instruments seem to be the survival of the Turkic lamentation and singing accompanied by musical instruments.

We know that the continuation of the mourning period was quite considerable in the pre-Islamic Turkish custom. This custom was banned by the tradition of the Prophet Muhammad. It allows the bereaved to mourn for only three days, but for women mourning for their husbands it is four months and ten days.⁷² The present day Muslim Turks in Turkey retain their pre-Islamic mourning period of up to three years. However, we cannot say that these commemoration and mourning ceremonies are non-Islamic. These ceremonies are celebrated in an Islamic atmosphere by reciting the Qur'an, preaching sermons, singing *mevlid*, eulogies, sacrificing animals in the name of Allah and organising feast ceremonies for the sake of the soul of the deceased.

⁶⁹ A. R. Yalgın, *Cenupta Türkmen Oymakları*, Ankara, 1977, p. 61.

⁷⁰ Oguz (1980), pp. 272, 348,

⁷¹ In general, the *Mevlid* which includes the episode of the birth, prophecy and death of the Prophet Muhammad, and some quality of His companions, occupies very important place in all commemoration ceremonies. This eulogy was written by Süleyman Çelebi in 1409 with title "*Vesiletu'n-Necât*".

⁷² Bukhari (1971) vol. 2, pp. 206-207.

The custom of wearing black or white clothes inside out, as a symbol of mourning, is retained by the Anatolian Turks. This attitude is also seen in the early Islamic period. As was pointed out above, in the funerals of the Seljuks and Ottomans, as a symbol of mourning they wore white in the palace, but black in public funerals to be seen different from their daily appearances.

Other commemorative post-burial ceremonies (the First Friday or the First Week, the Fortieth Day of the Dead, the Fifty-Second Day of the Dead, the First Festival of the Dead and the Anniversary of the Dead) are very special occasion for the family, therefore the bereaved or acquaintances organize a recitation of the Qur'an, singing the *mevlid*, preaching traditional sermons which consist of great religious motifs, making vows, and donation of food or other valuables, and prepare a feast for the sake of the soul of the departed. Each ceremony in question should be greater than the earlier one.

These long extended ceremonies include some Islamic features, although the Prophet Muhammad suggested that the Muslims prepare food for the bereaved for seven days.⁷³ Beyond the perspective of the social solidarity of the commemorative feasts urged by the Prophet Muhammad, feast ceremonies in our case bear a communal aspect for the sake of the soul of the dead person as in the pre-Islamic belief. One of the pre-Islamic commemoration customs was giving a feast, *ash* or *yog töreni*, as is seen in the Turkish myths Oghuz, Manas and Dede Korkut, for the sake of the soul of the dead person on regular appointed days. According to the pre-Islamic Turkic belief, the souls of children wandered for seven days, and those of adults for forty days around the house after death (another variant of the belief is that the spirits of the dead gather for one night each year, go into the settlements where they passed their lives, and visit their families. The droning or rustling sound which they make is called *tiki* or *üzüt payram*, and whoever meets up with this sound at night will die). At the end of this period, the bereaved engaged in a ceremony to make the soul happy and to stop its haunting others.⁷⁴ This custom is retained by the present day Turks as a great celebration, but in an islamised form. For example, according to the present day popular belief, too, the soul of the deceased visits its home until the corpse is buried, or for forty days after death or on holy days and in holy months (*Rajab, Sha'ban, Ramadan*) in order to ask for *du'a* for itself or because it misses the bereaved or to check whether the chimneys are burning or not. To make it blessed the bereaved should prepare some kind of ceremonies as will be seen below. Otherwise, the soul of the deceased will haunt them. In this respect, post burial ceremonies take a longer time, and involve great celebrations and are as significant as disposal ceremonies in ordinary life.

The pre-Islamic commemoration ceremonies of the third, seventh and ninth months, and the anniversaries of the dead are retained by sanctifying them with

⁷³ Bukhari (1971), vol. 2, pp. 202-206.

⁷⁴ Anohin, p. 422.

Islamic features, such as the First Jum'a, First Week, Fortieth Day, Fifty-Second Day and anniversaries that are very special times for the preparation of feasts and to read the Qur'an from cover to cover, singing *mevlid*, etc. for the sake of the deceased. It is believed that the soul would haunt or curse them if such an occasion is not fulfilled. The precursor of these commemoration ceremonies with feasts might be the pre-Islamic tradition since, according to the popular belief, the purpose of a feast is to make happy the soul of the deceased which wanders around the house in order not to haunt them.

To sum up, the funeral ceremonies from disposal to commemoration of the dead performed in present day mainly follow traditional Islamic teaching, while they consist of a number of 'borrowed' or 'added' or 'imported' rites, rituals and superstitions from the more distant cultural heritage. However, in some cases people do not understand the *essence* of the ceremonies, they offer them as 'tradition', but in islamized forms. Both in pre-Islamic traditional practices and in Islamic times, the main point of the feasts in commemoration ceremonies is to make happy the soul of the dead person.

6- Superstitions Related to Prevention Rites and Grave Veneration

Those who have the portents impending death of someone already mentioned above, apply some preventive rites and rituals to avoid bad omens impending someone's death, depending on their financial situation, time, religiousness, social status, etc. The rites and rituals of prevention are mostly institutionalised around the tombs or graves of the saints, pious persons or founders of religious orders whether they are legendary or real. For this purpose almost in all cities and towns in Turkey there are at least a few tombs of the saints⁷⁵ The prevailing popular rites and rituals are, to venerate shrines, to sacrifice an animal, to make a vow or wish for good things by tying clothes around the shrines, to donate money, to recite the Qur'an and to sing *mevlid* ceremony, to preach sermons, to stay for a long time at the shrine, to burn candles on the grave stones, to throw coins at the site of the grave, to circumambulate the shrine seven or forty times, to pour libate water, to break bottles, to eat soil, to take stone or water home from the shrine, to stick stones on the grave stone, to kiss the grave, to rubb a painful limb on the grave, etc. In addition to these rites of prevention, people also have specific rites relating to tombs or shrines to prevent the death of a baby whose elder siblings have hitherto died soon after their birth by thaking the new-born baby to any shrine and repeating some certain practices.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ N. Aytürk & B. Altan, *Türkiye'de Dini Ziyaret Yerleri*, Ankara, 1992, pp. 59-319; G. M. Smith, 'Some Turbes-Maqams of Sari Saltuk', *Turcica*, 14, 1982, pp. 219ff; F. W. Hasluck, *Christianity and Islam Under the Sultans*, Oxford, 1929, vol. 1, p. 236; vol.2, pp. 429-439; Herbert (1965), p. 78.

⁷⁶ C. C. Güzelbey 'Beliefs and Traditions Concerning Childbirth and Children', *Türk Folklor Arastirmalari*, 1981/2, pp. 19-36.

It is believed that if the request is to be granted, people venerate any shrine and in return they perform certain rites and rituals. After these ceremonies the bereaved grows calmer and continues his/her daily life as before.⁷⁷ First of all, it must be stated that people believe that all the rites and rituals they perform are religious or Islamic. However, with regard to the Qur'anic teaching that Allah has granted an "appointed term" to every person and this appointed term will not be postponed by an hour nor an advance (Q. 16:61), the Department of Religious Affairs in Turkey and also *muftis* in other Turkic countries, consider most prevention rites and rituals accounted above as 'non-Islamic', and call them *hurafe*, or superstitions, and *bid'at-i seniyye*, or pernicious innovations.⁷⁸ Contrary to this statement and general rule that man cannot know where, when and how he will die, people prevalingly employ preventive rites or rituals around the tombs of saints or any shrine to postpone impending death, maybe as a comfort or palliative.

Another point of which people are accused is, in the religious officials' view, putting saints as mediators between themselves and God. Since people venerate shrines in Turkey they do not ask Allah directly, but ask in the name of the goodness of the saints, such as, "O Lord, O Allah! please accept my prayer by the courtesy of your beloved servant so and so." The venerators consider that as a result of this their requests are granted, because they offer them in the presence of the *khalil Allah*, which means friend of God.

There now remains the question of why the people believe and perform such practices while they are accused with 'non-Islamic' or 'means of mediator' or 'pernicious innovation' even with 'infidelity' or 'hell-fire'. Apparently, these beliefs and practices, firstly, may be a possible result of this Islamic discourse which recommends the Muslims to take refuge from evil and that for every disease, whether physiological or psychological, there is a remedy by taking an ordinary prayer ablution and the recitation of the *aya al-Kursi* (Qur'an, 2: 255), or other *du'as*.⁷⁹ On the other hand, while these rites and rituals are practised in an Islamic context, although they are not Islamic in origin, for us, it is possible that the inspiration of this idea or belief might had been descended from the traditional Turkic observances in the past.

In pre-Islamic Turkic religion visiting ancestors' graves was of paramount importance. On different days people visited the graves of their ancestors to remember them and ask for their help. Modern day grave veneration rites and rituals which are performed to ask good fortune and to prevent possible unlucky events can be paralleled with the pre-Islamic concept of *iduk yer-sub* meaning sacred place and water where the heavenly and the ancestral spirits (who could help survival in difficult times) gathered. *Iduk yer-sub* has the power to protect or curse the nation by means of god, Tengri, depending on the attitude of the nation.

⁷⁷ Oguz (1980), pp. 168, 268, 358, 476.

⁷⁸ Erdil (1991), pp. 53-67.

⁷⁹ Bukhari, vol. 9, pp. 95-96.

According to belief, not all earth or water is sacred, but only some parts of the earth (*Ötügen yis*, and some high places),⁸⁰ and some of its waters (springs, streams, lakes, rivers) are regarded as sacred and people turn to these. This conception is mentioned in the inscriptions on the east side of the Kül Tegin and Bilge Kagan inscriptions

...üze türük tengrisi, türük iduk yiri subı ança etmis. Türük bodun yook bolmazun tiyin, bodun bolçun tiyin kanim İteris kaganig ögüm İlbilge Katunug tengri tepesinde tutup yügeri götürmüs...

"Tengri of the Turks in heaven and the sacred place and water of the Turks in the earth have together ordained the protection and exaltation of my father, İteris Kagan and my mother İlbilge Hatun, so that the Turkish nation may not perish and ultimately become unified and victorious..."⁸¹

To ignore or insult the sacred places or waters brings an epidemic or some other form of national disaster. People feel they should thus respect them and offer religious sacrifices to counteract forthcoming disasters.⁸² This power was always believed to protect the country and people if they respected them by sacrificing animals called *Tengere Tayig* or *Tigir Tayican*, and praying to these.⁸³

Every tribe had its own particular sacred place where they offered celebrations while tribes in confederations had their 'common national' sacred places, in the Ötügen and Altai mountains for instance.⁸⁴ After the sacrificial celebration, the ceremony was carried out by praying to the sacred spirit. In their praise they wished the goodness of Tengri for the nation and for the animals and plants. The main reason for the prayer was to have the sacrifices accepted and their wishes fulfilled by *Tengri*. The strong belief of the nation in Tengri was emphasised by praising: "Do not worry, there is *Tengri*, there is *Iduk Yer-Sub*." Before eating the meat of the sacrifice, people attached white, black and blue ribbons to the trees around the sacred places. They then made a libation of *raqi*, a kind of Turkish wine, over the trees. If there was no hill or high mound they piled stones up and made cairns called *oba* or *oobo*. The same ceremonies were enacted around this cairn. If they lost one of these sacred places they sung eulogies as though all the nation had died.⁸⁵ In addition, the ancient Turks attached a piece of fabric to these cairns so as to sanctify their travels, battles, and so on. All was done to make the spirit of earth or water happy. In later times, the cairn came to be crafted in the shape of idols called *töz*, and used in the Buddhist temples. They are

⁸⁰ Inan (1986), p. 50.

⁸¹ T. Tekin, *Orhon Yazıtları*, Ankara, 1988, pp. 10-11, 40-41.

⁸² Tekin (1988), pp. 14-15, 50-51.

⁸³ Inan (1986), pp. 47-49.

⁸⁴ Inan (1986), pp. 49-51; Tekin (1988), pp. 2-5, 28-29.

⁸⁵ Inan (1986), pp. 49-62; Oguz (1980), p. 390.

not regarded as gods, but as a commemorative of the sacred soul. They protect the people who offered certain rites or rituals, with the permission of *Tengri*.⁸⁶

In the Islamic context, as indicated in the Qur'an, veneration of the grave as a sanctuary or source of pride is banned and unacceptable,⁸⁷ though according to the *ahadith*, ordinary grave visitings were not prohibited by the Prophet Muhammad. Although in the beginning, he recommended Muslims to fear Allah and to be patient, banned wailing during visitation of the graveyards and suggested calmness to prevent excessive wailing and lamentations at the time of death, he later recommended Muslims to visit graveyards to remember the hereafter. He even allowed people to shed tears as a sign of the mercy of Allah.⁸⁸ His tomb at Madina and the tombs of his great companions have been frequented and venerated by the Muslims. In the centuries following his death various pious leaders and ghazis appeared in many Muslim areas, and their tombs are frequented.⁸⁹ Islam does not regard any sanctuary beyond the symbolic places (the mosque (*jami'*); (Q. 9:28), Jerusalem (formerly) (Q. 2:142-145) and the Ka'ba (Q. 3:96). However, it seems that when the Turks converted to Islam approximately a thousand years ago, they retained their old custom of asking the goodness of *Iduk Yer-sub* with the permission of *Tengri* by venerating their heavenly and ancestral protective spirits at sacred places, in the form of the veneration of the graves of the Muslim saints in order to remove the warning of death or to have something or to gain the blessing of a saint. By doing this, they combined and enriched their old customs with the Islamic elements.

7- Saint Cult

For the owner of the tombs, shrines or sanctuaries where people venerate and perform certain prevention rites and rituals around of it as was mentioned above, various names, mostly Islamic, such as *veli, evliya, abit, zahit, alim, sofı, seyyid, sheyh, ghazi, mübarek, pir, shehid, eren, ermiş, dede, baba ve abdal* are given and many extraordinary stories, legends and miracles⁹⁰ which obviously show the influence of the pre-Islamic Turkic traditions, are attributed. We do not come accross such names from the pre-Islamic *milieu*, however, other traditions are almost the same, beyond the some islamised motifs, as will be seen below.

In the pre-Islamic times people told and believed, in a shamanistic way. In this section, we will comparatively give some common patterns both from the

⁸⁶ Inan (1986), pp. 42-47; Kalafat (1990), p. 39.

⁸⁷ Q. 102:1-2.

⁸⁸ Bukhari (1971), vol. 2, pp. 208-210, 219-220

⁸⁹ Herbert (1965), pp. 67-68.

⁹⁰ Ü. Günay, H. Güngör, S. Kuzgun, H. Sayim, A. Tastan, *Kayseri ve Çevresinde Ziyaret ve Ziyaret Yerleri*, Kayseri, 1996, pp. 10-11.

present day ongoing Islamic and traditional Turkic⁹¹ legends about the certain saints.

a. Transformation from one body to another: This is a very common aspect of the hagiology or oral traditions. For example, a dangerous Yakut shaman, Yölken Bıraayı was about to be killed by other good shamans. They metamorphosed themselves into bear, wolf, dog and ox in order to kill Yölken Bıraayı, but he also transformed into a bird and saved himself from them by flying.⁹² One man and one woman shamans metamorphosed into fishes to examine their power before being a shaman.⁹³ In the legends of the the both *Sunni* and *Alavite* Muslim saints, they are also seen in the form of various animals for a special duty. Hacı Bektashi Veli who is well-known saint all over the country, is seen in the form of pigeon;⁹⁴ Abdal Musa and Geyikli Baba in Bursa who metamorphosed to deer as well, to complete his mission, such as saving people.⁹⁵ This is one of the most remarkable motifs barrowed from the pre-Islamic tradition.

b. To be at different seven places at the same time: A Yakut shaman, Kıcakan used to be seen at seven different places.⁹⁶ The Muslim saints are also attributed to the same peculiarity. Some examples are the tombs of Sari Saltuq or Saltuq Baba in nine countries,⁹⁷ Edeb Ali (d.1326), the father-in-law of Osman I (d. 1326) who founded the Ottoman State, in Bilecik and Eskisehir; the tomb of Murad I (d.1389) in Bursa and Kosova; the tombs of Suleyman Pasha, son of Orhan, in Bolayir and Yenisehir; Hasan Baba a *nakhshbandi* (of a *sunni* order) saint at seven points in the Balkans (Rumeli) and tombs of numerous devout people.⁹⁸

c. To punish those who inconsiderates: Shamaness Küsteh one day visited a women and asked her to cook some meat, but woman told lie that she had not meat. That is why, the shamaness punished her with death of her animals.⁹⁹ Similar expressions are seen in the Muslim saintology. In this context, one finds necromantic legends about the shrines of the saints who bless or torture any person with regard to his/her attitude to certain places. In this way, people have produced numerous legends to increase the sacredness of such shrines. For instance, those who are inconsiderate to the shrines would be punished by invisible powers with

⁹¹ Traditional Turkic examples were collected among the contemporary adherents of traditional Turkic religion, in Central and Northern Asia.

⁹² Fuzuli Gözelov, Celal Gözelov, *Şaman Efsaneleri ve Söylemeleri*, Bakı, 1993, p. 84.

⁹³ Ibid, p. 76.

⁹⁴ Hacı Bektaş Veli, *Vilayetname*, pp. 18, 19.

⁹⁵ Ögel (1971), s. 29.

⁹⁶ Gözelov & Mehmedov, p. 69.

⁹⁷ His tombs are in those countries: Babaeski, Eskibaba, Iznik, Bor-Nigde, Diyarbakir, Hozat (Turkey), in Babadag (Romania), in Xass (Kosova) and in Mostar (Bosnia); Smith, (1982), pp. 219, 220, 221; Hasluck (1929), vol. 2, pp. 429-439.

⁹⁸ Hasluck (1929), vol. 1, p. 236; Tansel (1963), pp. 185-236.

⁹⁹ Gavril Vasilyevič Ksenofontov, *Shamanism Izbrannie Trudi*, Yakutsk, 1992, p. 184.

poverty, accident, death, etc., on the other hand, a person who is respectful of a shrine may be rewarded with good things,¹⁰⁰ as in examples of the shrines of Ali Baba and Helvacı Dede, Seyyid Burhaneddin and others in Kayseri. They punished those who cursed them.¹⁰¹

d. Not to burn in a fire: The chief of Irkuts ordered his soldiers to kill Shaman Mahunay in a straw heap. They did what they were told, but at the end, Mahunay shook off ashes and went on. This is also seen in the story of the shaman Totogos who did not burn in a strong fire.¹⁰² This motif is also seen commonly both in the Sunni and Alavi Muslim traditions, dedicated to their own saints, in order to emphasize saints' miracles.¹⁰³

e. To transform people to stone: The shaman Totogos transformed enemy soldiers who wanted to arrest him and his girl-friend.¹⁰⁴ In the islamised forms, sacred places belonging to the Muslim saints transform people, who inconsiderate that certain place, to stone. For example, Sheyh Aslan, a legendary saint in Kayseri, cursed two persons by transforming them to stone, as one girl and one young man who loved each other intercoursed at his tomb.¹⁰⁵ Some saints also could transform enemy soldiers to stone in order to prevent their attack.¹⁰⁶

f. To fly in the sky: This is a similar case with the metamorphoses of the shamans or saints into birds. In addition to this, according to the islamised traditions, saint can fly or go from one place to another in a miraculous way regardless of distance in order to help or serve to any or certain religious people, as in the cases of Hacı Bektas Veli and Somuncu Baba who fought on behalf of the Muslim warriors and also Helvacı Dede of Kayseri who delivered some very fresh sweetmeat made in Kayseri to Ka'ba, to Tur Hasan during his pilgrimage at Macca.¹⁰⁷

g. Miscellaneous: Other common characteristics are also available both in pre-Islamic traditions and islamised context such as, to be able to know in the know, to lead the natural events, to give life to the dead, to walk on the water, to cure every kind of diseases, to be seen after death, to foretell, soothsay, to act in necromancy, etc.

¹⁰⁰ Gözaydın (1985), pp. 49-80.

¹⁰¹ Günay, Güngör, Kuzgun, Sayim, Tastan, pp. 20, 23-26.

¹⁰² Ksenofontov, p. 185.

¹⁰³ A. Yaşar Ocak, *Türk Halk İnançlarında ve Edebiyatında Evliya Menkabeleri*, Ankara, 1984, pp. 91-93.

¹⁰⁴ Gözelov & Mehmedov, p. 63.

¹⁰⁵ Günay, Güngör, Kuzgun, Sayim & Tastan, p. 53.

¹⁰⁶ For more examples, see H. Güngör, *Türk Bodun Bilimi Araştırmaları*, Kayseri, 1998.

¹⁰⁷ Günay, Güngör, Kuzgun, Sayim & Tastan, p. 20.

Conclusion

This article has attempted to show the pre-Islamic Turkic elements concerning the death customs. Although people are the adherents of Islam, they retain their pre-Islamic national, traditional Asiatic beliefs and practices almost at every stages of daily life, particularly concerning death customs (superstitions: portents of death pertained to the signs of animals, dreams, etc., and prevention beliefs), disposal of dead, post-burial ceremonies, veneration of graves related to prevention from impending death depicted from the signs of animals, dreams, etc., and the tradition of saint cult. They preserve their ancestral beliefs and practices from traditional times, but in additional islamised motifs, and do not go beyond the Islamic boundaries which control the society. By doing this, people saw no harm to juxtapose their ancient beliefs and practices with the Islamic elements, since they do not make a distinction between them as 'Islamic' or 'non-Islamic'. However, the Islamic scholars or authorities prohibit them as 'superstitions' and 'pernicious innovations'. As a result, a number of significant points can be seen throughout this investigation, as follows: Syncretism of pre-Islamic Turkic and Islamic elements of beliefs and practices, continuity of Asiatic-Turkic cultural elements, religious conservatism of the people, and popularity of beliefs and practices.

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