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The Ontological Characteristics of Shamanism: The Oghuz Turks' Conversion from Shamanism to Islam in the 4th Century AH

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Abstract

The principal component of the ancient religion of the Turks was shamanism. Although some influence of Buddhist ideas among them has also been noted, the majority of Turkic tribes, including the Oghuz, the ancestors of the Seljuks, were followers of the shamanic tradition. The core of this belief system (Manaism) was based on communication with the spirits of the dead and belief in the sky god, Tangri.Shamanism was both a ritual practice and a way of perceiving the world, rooted in ancient ethnic beliefs. It was regarded as a form of animism that gradually became intertwined with religious beliefs. The Oghuz Turks regarded shamanic priests as mediators between humans and spirits, including the spirits of the dead. They turned to shamans to act as intermediaries with the gods in resolving their problems.However, the foundations of this worldview were not compatible with eschatological thought and could not adequately explain the necessary interaction between this world and the hereafter in accordance with the needs of the Turks during their transition from nomadism to sedentary life. This study, conducted using a descriptive-analytical method, seeks to answer the following question: What was the nature of the doctrinal foundations of shamanism that led the Oghuz to abandon it in favor of Islam? The findings reveal that shamanism was primarily concerned with the past and present, that is, with the spirits of the dead and the followers of the shamans in the present, and offered no answer regarding the salvation of its followers. Its belief system failed to provide sustainable solutions to the challenges of the Oghuz during this transitional period. Consequently, when the Turks came into contact with Muslims along their borders, they chose Islam both to adapt to the Islamic world and to find answers to their social needs and worldview.

Keywords: Shamanism; Oghuz; Doctrinal Foundations; Islam; Manaism; Livelihood.

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