



The Origins of Contemporary Encounters between the West and Turks

Türkler ve Batı Arasındaki Mevcut Temasların Kökenleri

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Özet

Göçebe kavimlerin barbar ve kötü ruhlardan neşet ettikleri yönündeki Greko-Romen varsayımı yıllar boyunca hemen hemen hiç değişmemiştir. O zamandan bu yana, pek çok tarihçi ve âlim bu fikri kabullenmiş ve Hunlar gibi göçebe kavimlerin vahşi ve medeniyetten uzak olduklarını iddia etmişlerdir. Bu toplumların da kendi yaşadıkları coğrafi ve siyasi şartlar içerisinde kendilerine özgü bir medeniyet, teknik ve sanat geliştirdikleri, yapılan bilimsel çalışmalar neticesinde ortaya çıkmaktadır. İlginç olan husus, Türkler hakkındaki önyargıların Antik Dönem'den bu yana, çok az değişmesidir. Hıristiyanlık sonrası dönemde bu önyargılar daha da güçlenmiş ve Hıristiyan âleminin dışında kalan Türkler'in Müslüman olmasından sonra ise adeta zirveye ulaşmıştır. Bu makalenin amacı, yüzyıllardır devam eden Türkler hakkındaki önyargıları tetkik ederek kaynaklarını ortaya koymak ve bunların yanlışlıklarını göstermektir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Türkler, Göçebelik, İslamlaşma, Doğu-Batı İlişkileri, Çağdaşlaşma.

Abstract

The ancient Greco-Roman fantasy that pastoral nomadic tribes were barbarians and the descendents of evil spirits has changed little over the years. Since then, many scholars and historians have fallen for such stereotypes, arguing that nomadic tribes such as the Huns were excessively savage and wild. Unfortunately, they have not done much to correct those antique biases, even though supposedly more 'advanced' societies committed atrocities against the early Christians, American Indians, Africans and European Jewry. On the other hand, the Turks, believing that the Huns are the ancestors of all Turkic tribes, think that the pastoral nomadic way of life required the utmost rigor and aptitude, and therefore deserves as much respect as agrarian societies. Although contemporary conflicts between the West (consisting of Europe and North America) and Turks seem to have diverse sources, their roots may go as deep as Antiquity. The negative outcome of cultural encounters in our age may indeed be closely related with misconceptions of pastoral nomadic ways of life, barbarism and finally Islamic culture.

Key-words: Turks, Nomads, Islamization, East-West Relations, Modernization.

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“And now what will become of us, without any barbarians? Those people were some kind of a solution.”

C. P. Cavafy, *Waiting for the Barbarians*

Cultural Perspectives and Nomenclature for the (Proto) “Turk”

According to Biblical belief, the historic tribes of the world are the descendents of Noah's three sons: Shem, Ham, and Japheth. Among these three brothers, Japheth is believed to be the forefather of the Eurasian tribes such as the Scythians (Sakhas), Serbs, Croats, Armenians, Welsh, Picts, Irish, Germans (Teutons) and Turks. Turkic epics and legends refer to Japheth as Olchai Olcay, Ulgay or Bulcas Khan, who lived as a nomad. The 15th century Ottoman historian Mehmed Neşri states that Bulcas Khan, who was the son of Japheth (Yâfes) and the grandson of Noah (Nuh), is the forefather of the brave Turks (Türk) and the Mongols.¹

The earliest Turkic² people were pastoral nomads organized in small clans and tribes, dwelling in hair tents, hunting large and small game and dependent on horse flesh. The most important characteristics defining the economic essence of this pastoral nomadism are:³

- i. Pastoralism is the predominant form of economic activity.
- ii. Its extensive character is connected with the maintenance of herds all year round on a system of free-range grazing without stables.
- iii. Periodic mobility in accordance with the demands of the pastoral economy within the boundaries of specific grazing territories, or between these territories (as opposed to migrations).
- iv. The participation in pastoral mobility of all or the majority of the population (as opposed, for example, to the management of herds on distant pastures by specialist herdsmen, in which only a minority is involved in pastoral migrations).
- v. The orientation of production towards the requirements of subsistence (as opposed to the capitalist ranch or dairy farming of today).

¹ “Bu tâife be-gayet bahâdır olurlar ve bunların mecmû’ı Bulcas Han bin Yâfes bin Nuh aleyhiselâm evlâdındandır.” Mehmed Neşri, *Kitâb-ı Cihan-nümâ (Neşri Tarihi)*, (Haz.: Faik Reşit Unat ve Mehmed A. Köymen), Türk Tarih Kurumu, Ankara 1995, p.9.

² term applicable to all Turks

³ Anatoly M. Khazanov, *Nomads and the Outside World*, The University of Wisconsin Press, Wisconsin 1994, p.16.

Gradually, Turks began engaging in agriculture, handicrafts and trade. Sometimes pastoral nomadism and urban life co-existed, and the proportion of Turks leading sedentary lives as opposed to nomadic lifestyles grew over time. Uzbeks and the Uyghurs on the other hand have been sedentary for centuries.

Despite the gap of several centuries between their rise, most Turkish historians have a tendency to relate the ancient Hsiung- nu (Xiongnu) of East Asia with the Huns of medieval Eurasia and consider them the ancestors of the nomadic Turkic tribes. Having become known to Europeans by the name “Hun” or variants thereof, these westward migrants were probably related to the Hsiung- nu. The antique description of the Huns given by the historian Ammianus Marcellinus which states, “They were apparently (primitive) pastoralists who knew nothing about agriculture; they had no settled homes and no kings; each group was led by primates”⁴ is likely one of the earliest biased points of view of a nomadic society. The image of the Huns did not change during the positivist era, and centuries after their first appearance, those ideas have been regenerated:

In the English-speaking world, the theme was picked up again by Edward Gibbon; Attila and the Huns play a dramatic role in his *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, a very widely read and admired work which shaped all the subsequent accounts of these turbulent years. But the notoriety of the Huns was established forever during the First World War when British propagandists, hoping to cash in on the ancient reputation of these people, began using the term 'Hun' to mean Germans. By this they hoped to evoke those ancient images of brutishness and barbarism to stir up hatred.⁵

According to Denis Sinor, the first mention of “Türk” may date to the first century A.D. : “It could be that the first mention of the name Turk was made in the middle of the first century A.D. Pomponius Mela (I,n6) refers to the Turcae in the forests north of the Azov Sea, and Pliny the Elder in his *Natural History* (VI, 19) gives a list of peoples living in the same area among whom figure the Tyrcae.”⁶ A search of archaeological literature for the word “Turk” reveals that the very first inscribed words are the two syllabic forms “Tü-rük” and “Tur-ku” can be seen in the Orkhon (Orhun) inscriptions (716-735 C.E.), and this is believed to have been transformed into the single syllable “Turk” that we use today. Those inscriptions were written by using a sophisticated alphabet, which implies that these letters date back to a much earlier period. Some earlier Chinese sources mention a people called the Tujue (T’u-chu□e), whom modern scholars have identified as Turks.

Figure 1. Transcription of the inscription and comparison with Orkhon-Gokturk equivalent⁷

⁴ Britannica Macropedia 6, p.147

⁵ Hugh Kennedy, *Mongols, Huns & Vikings*, Cassell & Co., London 2002, p.24

⁶ Denis Sinor, “The Establishment and Dissolution of the Türk Empire”, (Ed.Denis Sinor), **The Cambridge History of Early Inner Asia**, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1994, p.285

⁷ **Turkic History**, Türkic Inscriptions – Codex of Inscriptions.



According to Chinese records, which were later supported by Soviet archaeologists, the Altai (Altay) mountains and environs are the proto-Turkic motherland (1700-1200 B.C.E.). But the expanded Turkic main land is what came to be referred to as “traditional Central Eurasia” after the Early Middle Ages, and included the temperate zone roughly between the lower Danube River region in the west and the Yalu River region in the east, and between the sub-Arctic taiga forest zone in the north and the Himalayas in the south. It included the Western (Pontic) Steppe and North Caucasus Steppe (now Ukraine and south Russia), the Central Steppe and Western Central Asia, also known together as West Turkistan (now Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Kirghizstan), Southern Central Asia (now Afghanistan and north eastern Iran), Jungharia and Eastern Central Asia or the Tarim Basin, also known together as East Turkistan (now Xinjiang), Tibet, the Eastern Steppe (now Mongolia and Inner Mongolia), and Manchuria. Of these regions, most of the Western Steppe, Inner Mongolia, and Manchuria are no longer culturally part of Central Eurasia.⁸

The Turkic tribes in Central Eurasia can be classified according to the Turkic languages (Altaic group⁹) they speak. One of these large linguistic groups is the south-eastern group (Uyghur or Chagatai group), found in East Turkistan, including Uyghur (Uighur) and Uzbek. The north-western (Kipchak) group is another large group, and includes languages spoken from the Crimea to the Volga-Ural region and the Kazakh steppe, such as Crimean Tatar, Karaim, Kumyk, Krachay, Balkar, Kazan Tatar, Kara Kalpak, Nogay, Bashkir, Kazakh, and Kirghiz. The south-western language (Oguz or Turkmen) group, that of the Turkic influx into the Middle East, includes Gagauz, Turkmen, Azeri, and Anatolian Turkish. All these groups include other languages spoken by small numbers of speakers. A fourth regional grouping, the north eastern Siberian group, consists entirely of languages spoken by small Siberian peoples, the most numerous being the Sakha (Khakass), Yakut, Tuvianian and Altai. Two final groups consist of isolated languages with archaic features (r-Turkic): Chuvash in Russia, and Khalaj in Iran.¹⁰

http://www.s155239215.onlinehome.us/turkic/30_Writing/PrimitiveFutharkRu.htm (Access date: 17.05.2011).

⁸ Christopher I. Beckwith, **Empires of the Silk Road, A History of Central Eurasia from the Bronze Age to the Present**, Princeton University Press, Princeton 2009, p. XX.

⁹ One of the world’s ten largest linguistic families, numbering more than 140 million people scattered through more than 20 countries across Eurasia.

¹⁰ Carter Vaughn Findley, **The Turks in World History**, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2005, p.17

The spiritual belief of the ancient nomadic Turkic tribes can be described as “the way of Kam (qam).”¹¹ What underlies the belief of Kam is the soul of the respected ancestors of the community integrated with the soul of earth and sky, important natural events like wind and thunder, natural objects (such as the sun, mountains, rivers, trees, some birds and animals), the soul of nomadicism itself and skill. There is not a single creator or prevailing power in the Kam. Every entity forms a particle of Kam. Contrary to the monotheistic religions or Buddhism, this ancient nomadic belief has neither a prophet nor religious books or scriptures. An amalgam of the attitudes and ideas beyond religious belief is a form and a philosophy of the nomadic lifestyle. The way of Kam was a ritual, transferred verbally from generations. As tribes were mobile, there was no attempt to build temples; but each pavilion (*ev, yurt*) on the steppe could be considered as a miniature temple. The continually burning hearth fire (*ocak*) in the middle of the pavilion is stoked in honour of kam, in addition to its secular functions of heating the tent and serving as a source of light. Fire was believed to have a power that repels the “bad souls,” so when the Byzantine delegation sent by Emperor Justinus II (in the years 569-571 A.D.) arrived in the Gokturk lands with the purpose of forming an offensive alliance against the Persians, they were forced to jump over a fire in a ceremony directed by the kam before being allowed to enter the country.¹² Traces of this belief can still be observed in Muslim Turkish societies in Anatolia, Bashkurdistan and Kazakhstan where an ill person is treated by winding a piece of burning fabric around the body, a process believed to “clear the body,” a treatment referred to as “alaslama.”¹³ Centrally located in the round felt yurt, the hearth also symbolized the centre of the world. Among the significant sacred items in the tent were the bow and arrow, which may explain the early Turkic tribes’ reputation for excellence at archery.

In terms of symbolism, the sun was depicted as the mother, and the moon was the ancestor; the universe was composed of layers bound to each other with an axle. The spiritual leader (priest) of the tribe was also called kam (or shaman). The shaman (male or female) was a procurator of wise souls. Shamans used music and dance as a way to convey the wise souls’ message to humans. Shaman drums were decorated with the sun, moon, stars, and various animal figures. Other musical instruments range from plucked string and stringed instruments, ranging from the “kopuz,” “tutar,” “tambur,” “rewap,” “sata,” “donbla” and “aijik” to woodwind instruments such as the “suona horn” and “nayi flute.” Dances featured vigorous, graceful, gentle and capricious movements enhanced with head and body swirling. Shamans, in their ascent-to-heaven rituals, erected nine sticks which represent the layers of the universe and hang white, blue, red and yellow pieces of cloth on them. These were the symbols standing for the rainbow. The closest contemporary belief to ancient Turkic spirituality is Japanese Shintoism. It would be inappropriate to categorise the way of kams as a religion, however; it is rather a jumbled combination of folklore, history, and nomadic mythology.

¹¹ wise soul

¹² Hatice Palaz Erdemir, *VI. Yüzyıl Bizans Kaynaklarına Göre Göktürk-Bizans İlişkileri*, Arkeoloji ve Sanat Yayınları, İstanbul 2003, p.49.

¹³ Sadettin GÖMEÇ; “Şamanizm ve Eski Türk Dini”, *Pamukkale Üniversitesi Eğitim Fakültesi Dergisi*, No. 4, 1998, p.41.

In contrast, agriculturalist societies had gods and deities who often resembled human beings or animals, or both. Some of the Egyptian gods had human bodies and animal heads; Greek and Roman gods and goddesses were mostly human in form, and the god of the gods, Zeus, was capable of transforming himself into various animals, i.e. a swan. Some of the Egyptian gods (Amon Ra) personified the sun and moon. The Indo-European Hittites, rulers of Asia Minor during the second millennium BCE, proclaimed themselves “the people of a thousand gods,” among whom were deities of the sky and earth¹⁴.

Table 1. Religious Differences Between Agrarian & Pastoral Nomadic Societies

	Agrarian/Sedentary	Pastoral Nomads
Gods/Deities	Human/Animal Form	wise souls/fire/tree of life
Temples	Yes	No/Tori
Myths	Yes	Yes
Sacrifice	Yes	Yes
Scripts	Yes	No/Verbally transmitted

The spiritual differences between the polytheist sedentary and animist nomadic people made it almost impossible for them to understand each other’s mentality and ethics. The sedentary mode of living is characterized by confrontation with external conditions whereas the nomadic mode can be described as adaptation to those. According to the former attitude, human life must be positively approached with rationality. The latter, however, is thus viewed as irrational and cautious. This type of nomadic irrationalism holds of the belief that life cannot be dealt with utilizing purely rational methods.¹⁵

The Great Migration, Cultural Encounters and Islamization

The great migration of the Turkic tribes between the 3rd century B.C.E. and the 10th century C.E., from what is now Mongolia and East Turkestan and passing through the Tarim Basin, the Persian plateau, the central and western steppes towards India, Eastern Europe, the Balkans, Scandinavia and Anatolia, is perhaps the most striking mass migration of humans in history. During this long journey, Turkic tribes lived and settled down in various geographic regions, established various empires, came into contact with diverse cultures and underwent profound conversions. While protecting some of their shamanist traditions and maintaining some facets of nomadic identity, they began adopting aspects of the sedentary culture into

¹⁴ Margareth L.King, **Western Civilization**, Lauren King Publishing, London 2006, p.24

¹⁵ Hideki Yukawa, “Modern Trend of Western Civilization and the Cultural Peculiarities of Japan”, **Philosophy East and West**, Vol. 9, (No. 1/2, 1959), pp. 26-28.

which they had come in contact. Some groups adopted Buddhism (the Tuvans of Siberia and the Yellow Uyghurs of Gansu are still Buddhists) and later monotheist religions, including Judaism and Christianity, and in the end, most embraced Islam. Some, such as the Kara Khitai, never converted.

The original driving force of the very first migrations was the dependency of the pastoral nomadic economy on supplemental agricultural produce. During those times, Turkic tribes formed symbiotic alliances with the Mongols and Tunghuzs. Hsiung-nu (the early Huns) constituted the first nomadic confederation on the steppes. This loose-knit organisation helped establish linkages for the exchange of animal produce for agricultural products with sedentary societies. Later, they moved towards the cultivated south and started to enslave the northern Chinese. Defeating the Chinese army, they gained control of this territory, and China was forced to pay tribute (204-174 B.C.E.). During the drawn out fight against the Hsiung-Nu, successive Chinese dynasties built several walls, which together form the Great Wall of China: a 1845 km long fortification protecting mainland China from nomadic warriors. Perhaps this was one of the most significant conflicts in history: a clash between the agrarian Chinese and the early Turks, who were forced to rely on pastoralism, as they inhabited regions which were too arid for agriculture. This could also mark one of the earliest phases of state formation for the Turks and bilateral agreements.

The first political entity to bear the name "Turk" were the Gokturks (Kök-Türk) who lived in the area presently called the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous region of China. The name derives from *gok*, which means "blue" or "celestial". From 552-745 C.E., the Gokturk leadership united all nomadic Turkic tribes into the Göktürk Empire and created a Pax Turcica. Like Hsiung-nu, the Gokturk Empire was a nomadic tribal confederation.

Prominently Turkic, one of the most noteworthy nomad-based state was the the Khazar Empire (650-965 C.E.). This was one of the largest states of medieval Eurasia, extending from the Middle Volga lands in the north to the Northern Caucasus and Crimea in the south and from the Ukrainian steppe in the west to the western borders of present-day Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan in the east. The Khazar royalty and nobility converted to Judaism by the end of the eighth and start of the ninth centuries, and a portion of the general population also followed suit.¹⁶ It is quite likely that the Karaims of Eastern Europe are the descendants of the Khazars.

The Turkic tribes that converted either to Judaism or Christianity mostly abandoned their nomadic culture and Turkic identity. The Tatar tribes of the Kryashans (Kreshans), who converted to Christianity, and other tribes such as the Cossacks, whose name is based on the Turkic word "kazakh") and who speak a language that incorporates extensive borrowings from

¹⁶ Peter B. Golden, Haggai Ben-Shammai, Andras Rona-Tas, (Eds.), **The World of the Khazars, New Perspectives Selected Papers from the Jerusalem 1999, International Khazar Colloquium**, BRILL, Leiden 2007, p.1.

Turkic-based Kazakh and Tatar, considered themselves to be distinct Slavic groups.¹⁷ The same holds true for the Bulgars; Slavicized and Christianized, they gave their name to present Bulgaria. On the other hand, Turkic Orthodox Christians who were more fastidious about protecting their original identities were the Gagauz of the Danubian delta and the Chuvash of the Volga region.

The expansion of Islamic rule into Central Asia began with the campaigns of Qutayba ibn Muslim (705–15). Following the collapse of Khazaria, the Kara-Khanids (Kara-Hanlılar), a Turkic tribe and subjects of the Gokturks, converted to Islam and advanced to seize all territories east of the Oxus, as well as the former Samanid capital of Bokhara (Buhara). They were the first Muslim Turks to establish an independent state (840-1212). To the west of the Oxus, other Islamicized tribes of Turks, who were to become the Seljuks, began to wander freely between the Aral and Caspian Seas and press south toward the Persian cities of Khorosan. Still other shamanistic Turkic tribes, the Cumans and the Polovtzi, began to move directly past Khazaria and the lower Volga into the steppes of southern Russia. From Pamirs to the Don, the first two decades of the 11th century saw a number of Turkic tribes begin to migrate, unrestrained by the Khazar and Samanid authority which had long kept them in check.¹⁸

The issue of the contributions that nomadic peoples have made to world civilization has been largely ignored as a result of the stereotype that nomadic peoples are utterly savage and unable to establish institutions. It is generally assumed that sedentary societies are always more developed in all regards in comparison to nomadic peoples. This assumption does not take into account the fact that the harsh environment in which the nomadic peoples lived forced them to develop complex mechanisms of state power, military strategies and tactics that were vital for their survival. Donald Ostrowski argues that the Kipchak Khanate (the Golden Horde) influenced the Muscovite political and military institutions and also the relations between the state and society by showing unique similarities. However, the issue is controversial and some experts argue that the roots of these institutions lay in the west. The author goes on to ask: "... if it is acceptable to suggest that Russia may have been influenced from the west, why is it not equally acceptable to suggest that it may have been influenced from the east? Given its location, Russia was in a position that would allow it to choose and adapt over the course of centuries what it needed from both the east and the west."¹⁹ Evidence suggests that those peoples of Eurasia came into contact with other sedentary populations and there occurred an exchange of knowledge effected in numerous ways.²⁰

¹⁷James Minahan, **Encyclopedia of the Stateless Nations** (Vol.3 S-Z), Greenwood Publishing, London 2002, p.1857.

¹⁸ Archibald R.Lewis, **Nomads and Crusaders A.D.1000-1368**, Indiana University Press, Bloomington 1988, pp.88-89.

¹⁹ Donald Ostrowski, "The Mongol Origins of Muscovite Political Institutions", **Slavic Review**, Vol.49, No.4 (Winter, 1990), pp.525-542, p. 541.

²⁰ For a detailed study see especially: David W. Anthony, **The Horse, The Wheel and Language**, Princeton University Press, Princeton 2007.

Between the 10th and 14th centuries, most Turks converted to Islam and the adoption of this new religion transformed the Turkic identity more decisively than any other event. This conversion meant more than the acceptance of the Holy Koran and the prophet Mohammed, it meant accepting the provisions of Islamic Law (Sharia), adopting the Arabic alphabet and borrowing Arabic words, making advances in literature, the arts, and trade, urbanization, and the building of cities and places of worship. The Kara-Khanids constructed the first observable examples of adobe and brick monuments of Turkic architecture, including mosques, bridges, palaces and caravanserais (to support trade). Turkish became the official language and the first examples of Turkish-Islamic literature appeared. "Kitab Divanü Lugat it-Türk," a work on Turkic lexicography by Mahmud el-Kasghari appeared; according to the text, only the Kirghiz, the Kipchaq (Cuman), the Oghuz and five other tribes spoke a pure Turkic language, while the languages of the Bulgars, Suvars and Pechenegs (Bäčänäk), while undoubtedly Turkic, had been altered by foreign influences. Mahmud al-Kashgari believed that initially there were very few differences between all those languages, which were all phonetical.²¹ Another monumental work dating from the Kara-Khanid period was the "Kutadgu bilig," a treatise on the art of governing which was been written by Yusuf Has Hacib. Ahmed Yesevi, a sufi poet and founder of the Yesevi sect of Islam, also belongs to this period.

The reintegration and re-urbanization of Turkic tribes began with the formation of the great Seljuk Empire (1040-1157). As warriors of the orthodox Sunni Islamic faith, they started to settle down in Anatolia. Following the Seljuks, three major Islamic empires emerged, all led by Turkic rulers and with Turkic roots, to varying degrees: the Ottoman (1299-1922), Safavid (1501-1722), and Babur (Moghuls) (1526–1858).

In embracing Islam, the Turkic tribes made different interpretations and choices. The Safavids became proponents of orthodox Twelve Imam Shia Islam. Some of the new waves of Turkic migrants to Anatolia were members of Sufi orders; later, adaptations of Sufism appeared, such as the Bektasi order. Concern about the growing influence of the Safavis was one of the factors that prompted the Ottomans to permit unorthodox Bektasi Sufism to become the official order of the janissaries. The Alawites also developed as a sui generis sect in Anatolia, incorporating some nomadic cultural/spiritual elements. Fuad Köprülü has pointed out that the nomadic Muslim-Turkish population of Anatolia in the 13th century embraced a different version of Islam in comparison with the Muslim population dwelling in cities. Their religious practices were free of fanaticism and they were under the spiritual influence of "baba(s)" that were the representatives of the şaman/kam and preached a religious understanding which was just a continuation of the traditional Turkish faith under the "polish of Islam."²² The Babaî uprising of 1261 against the Seljuk authorities was led by the baba(s) and supported by the nomadic populations of Anatolia. According to Irène Mélikoff, the roots of Anatolian Sufism should be located in the Central Asian beliefs and practices which

²¹ Victor Spinei, *The Romanians and Turkic Nomads North of the Danube Delta from the Tenth to the Mid-Thirteenth Century*, BRILL, Leiden 2009, pp.181-182.

²² M. Fuad Köprülü, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nun Kuruluşu*, Akçağ Yayınları, Ankara 2006, p.77. Idem, *Anadolu'da İslâmiyet*, Akçağ Yayınları, Ankara 2005, p.18.

persisted over time.²³ There are many examples of that continuity, but one in particular stands out: the cult of mountains, in which some mountains were considered to be sacred places. This was a part of pre-Islamic Turkish faith in Central Asia, and is still perpetuated by the Alevi Turks of Anatolia.²⁴ When the Ottoman sultans revived the title of the Islamic Caliph, they based their legitimacy on Sunni Islam, and integrated religion into the government and administration. Despite the absence of a formal institutional structure, Sunni religious functionaries played an important political role. Justice was dispensed by religious courts, and in theory, the codified system of Sharia regulated all aspects of life, at least for the Muslim subjects of the empire.²⁵

The Ottoman Empire was the longest-lived Turkic state in recent history, and the Ottomans were determined to halt Turkic migration and pastoral nomadism. Ottoman leaders not only opted to settle down in Anatolia and built new cities, but they also forced other Turkic tribes to become city dwellers. Wandering nomadic tribes (some of whom were the Alevis) were difficult to govern, due to the fact that they did not settle in a given area but rather camped and moved on, making it difficult to control and tax them. Ottoman policies and regulations were strictly intended to settle nomads (*yürük*, from the verb *yürümek*, to walk or wander), either to sedentarize them or to circumscribe their migrations within a predictable “settled” routine.²⁶ In the meantime, nomadic Turkic tribes within the boundaries of the Russian Empire were subdued in a similar way, and the sedentarization of such tribes included the Bashkirs during the first third of the eighteenth century, the Nogays in the 1780s, the Kazakhs during the first half of the nineteenth century and the Turkmen in the 1880s.²⁷

Spreading Islam was the major driving force of the Ottoman state and this holy purpose motivated them to capture the lands of Eastern Rome (the Byzantine Empire). By 1580, the Ottoman Empire had conquered most of south-eastern Europe, which bordered present-day Austria (see Figure 2). This expansion was considered to be the biggest threat to the European civilisation; during those years, many scholars and churchmen incorporated Islam into the ancient Greco-Roman perception of the ‘barbarian’ (nomad). This topos was worsened with the common conviction that Muhammad was the antichrist and Islam was the work of this false prophet who was inspired by Satan. Anti-Turk propaganda was led by the church everywhere and it could easily be seen in prayers, hymns and sermons.²⁸ The Vatican was further infuriated by the fact that the Ottomans were deeply interested in and politically supported the Protestant movement. The Habsburg emperors were forced to grant privileges to

²³ Irène Mélikoff, *Uyur İdik Uyardılar (Alevilik-Bektaşilik Araştırmaları)*, Çev.: Turan Alptekin, Demos Yayınları, İstanbul 2006, p.141.

²⁴ Ahmet Yaşar Ocak, *Alevî ve Bektaşî İnançlarının İslâm Öncesi Temelleri*, İletişim Yayınları, İstanbul 2007, pp:114-122. The author has devoted one chapter to the issue of continuity of pre-Islamic Turkish beliefs in modern Alevi societies of Turkey.

²⁵ **Country Studies: Turkey**, <http://countrystudies.us/turkey/36.htm> (Access Date: 17.05.2011)

²⁶ Rudi Paul Lindner, *Nomads and Ottomans In Medieval Anatolia*, Indiana University, Bloomington 1983, p.51

²⁷ Reuven Amitai and Michal Biran (Eds.), *Mongols, Turks, and others: Eurasian nomads and the sedentary world*, BRILL, Leiden 2005 p.494.

²⁸ For a detailed analysis of this propaganda in the German lands especially see: Özlem Kumrular, *Türk Korkusu, Avrupa’da Türk Düşmanlığının Kökeni*, Doğan Kitap, İstanbul, 2008.

the Protestants in order to get their support in their fight against the Ottomans, and this ultimately contributed to the spread of Protestantism in Europe.²⁹ In addition to this indirect support, the Ottomans controlled the lands of present-day Hungary, which became a safe haven for Protestants who were persecuted in the Habsburg lands, resulting in the cooperation between Protestant Hungarians and the Ottomans.³⁰ However even in Protestant Britain in 1580s, the Anglican Church tried to block the establishment of diplomatic relations with the Ottoman Empire though in vain.³¹

Figure 2. Ottomans in Europe (1580)³²



Parallel to the negative perceptions pumped by Vatican, the Ottoman ruling class similarly developed a

derogatory attitude for Christian Europeans, by referring them as ‘infidel barbarians.’ An encounter and short conversation with an educated and pious European gentleman who lived in the time of the Ottoman siege of Vienna (1683) would be quite enough to understand why: One would hardly fail to notice that beneath his venerable wig, the fancy lace, the embroidery and the silk, his prinked, perfumed and powdered body stank, because he hardly ever washed. But his views on the world would be even more unsettling: all children should be thrashed, young girls (still children) should be married off to men they barely even know, a peasant’s lot is to toil and not complain, and beggars and tramps should be whipped and put in chains in the marketplace for everyone to mock. Thieves should be hanged, murderers publicly chopped into pieces and witches and other ‘dangerous’ sorcerers who infested the country should be burnt (the last time a woman was convicted of witchcraft in England was in 1712 and Germany in 1749). Furthermore, Jews and Muslims should be persecuted, tortured and thrown into dark dungeons. As protection against the coming plague, which had already claimed many victims in Venice, it would be considered sensible to wear a red arm band. Finally, selling

²⁹ Halil İnalcık, *Turkey and Europe in History*, Eren Yayıncılık, İstanbul 2006, p.174

³⁰ Ian Almond, *Two Faiths One Banner, When Muslims Marched with Christians Across Europe’s Battlegrounds*, I.B. Tauris, London 2009, see Chapter Four, pp:139-180.

³¹ Akdes Nimet Kurat, *Türk-İngiliz Münasebetlerinin Başlangıcı ve Gelişmesi, 1553-1610*, Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, Ankara, 1953, p.43.

³² *MidEast Web Gateway*, “A Concise History of Islam and Arabs”, <http://www.mideastweb.org/islamhistory.htm> (Access Date: 12.05.2011).

Negroes from Africa to America as slaves was a prosperous business, as American Indian conscripts did not take well to manual labour³³.

Sadly enough, decades later, even though Turks and West are no more enemies but allies, Vatican keeps the same attitude as can be summarized in the words of Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger (who later became Pope Benedict XVI):

‘The roots that have formed Europe, that have permitted the formation of this continent, are those of Christianity. Turkey has always represented another continent, in permanent contrast with Europe. There were the wars against the Byzantine Empire, the fall of Constantinople, the Balkan wars, and the threat against Vienna and Austria. It would be an error to equate the two continents...the entry of Turkey into the EU would be anti-historical.’³⁴

Unnoticed Transformation of the Sedentary Turk

Undoubtedly, the Turkish society has gone through radical transformations which were not thoroughly understood by the West.

The first event which changed the lifestyle of the pastoral nomad Turk was her contact with Islam. The second event, however, emerged from a rather unexpected source: the Enlightenment and the French Revolution of 1789. Muslim intellectuals coming into contact with their French compatriots began taking up the notion that all ‘citizens’ are subject to the same law (under the discourse of equality) and they should not longer be treated merely as peasants or serfs but rather as ‘free’ citizens of an independent ‘country.’ In the Ottoman system, however, ‘citizens’ were simply the subjects (*kul*) of the Sultan and had no rights. As the Ottoman Empire continues waning in power in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, a new generation of intellectuals referred to as the Young Turks (*Jeune Turc*) emerged, and they believed that the Ottoman revival could only be achieved through the creation of:

- i. A new class of citizen (*vatandaş, yurttaş*) whose rights are protected by law;
- ii. A homeland (*vatan, yurt*) in which citizens may register land and property under their names;
- iii. A nation (*millet, ulus*) which is not constructed around Islam but rather upon ethnic identity (which had previously been underplayed) and loyalty to the state; and,

³³ E.H.Gombrich, **A Little History of The World**, Yale University Press, Nev Haven 2005, pp.213-214.

³⁴ Quot. in: Andrew Wheatcroft, **The Enemy at the Gates, Habsburgs, Ottomans and the Battle for Europe**, The Bodley Head, London 2008, p.267.

- iv. New institutions, including a parliament, constitution and modern ideas based on (not Islam, but) rationality.

As this transformation would entail disengaging from centuries of Islamic traditions and which was based on western-inspired ideas put forward by reformist elites, the majority of whom were high-ranking military officers and civil servants, it naturally led to intense debates and opposition. For some traditional intellectuals (including the *ulema*), promoting such secular, western ideas would be the equivalent of proclaiming Islam's inefficiency and defeat. The secular Young Turk reformation, however, could not be stopped. As the result of reforms which had begun in 1839 and were redoubled in 1876 and 1908, reformers re-regulated the Ottoman state structure and, most importantly, established the very first parliament in Turkish history and held elections.

The end of World War I marked the end of the Empire. On November 1st, 1922, the Ottoman Sultanate (which had been fused with the caliphate in the 16th century) was abolished by the reformist parliament, and in the years that followed, a series of comprehensive reforms were undertaken. In 1923 a new state ("Türkiye") was founded as a republic. The caliphate, which had continued to function with greatly reduced authority, was completely abolished in 1924 to eliminate any challenges it could pose for the new nation. The Koran was translated into Turkish so that everyone could read it and think about its meaning; this particular action by Kemal Atatürk was more or less equivalent to the German translation of the Bible by Martin Luther approximately 400 years prior. The Arabic alphabet was replaced with a 29-letter Latin alphabet, and the *Mecelle* (an Ottoman code of law derived partly from Sharia) was abolished and a secular legal system replaced it. *Tekkes*, *zaviyes* (dervish monasteries) and *türbes* (tombs of Muslim saints) were closed down, and women were granted equal rights with men. European styles of dress were largely adopted, as were the Gregorian calendar, and numerals and units of measurement which adhered to European standards were adopted. The Turkish Historical Society was founded in order to study Eurasian Turkic peoples, as well as their states, culture and history, with the aim of granting Turks their proper place in the chain of civilizations. All of these reforms aimed essentially at transforming Oriental modes of discourse and creating a new paradigm free from dogma. The most important difference distinguishing the Young Turk reform movement from Atatürk's revolution was that while the former reforms were conceived in a theocratic environment, the latter were confidently undertaken within a secular social order and a secure future.³⁵

The major aim of this second transformation was to unite Turkish society with the West. However those huge efforts remained unnoticed. On the contrary prominent political scientist such as Samuel P. Huntington underlined the importance of religion as the main divisive political element and as the new political bloc forming dynamic, he came very close to the premises of political Islam and the world view of Osama Bin Laden. Thus, Al-Qaeda as a

³⁵ Utkan Kocatürk, "Atatürk's Revolutions and Modernization", *Atatürk Araştırma Merkezi Dergisi*, 13/5 (1988).

<http://www.atam.gov.tr/index.php?Page=DergiIcerik&IcerikNo=915> (Access Date: 26.04.2011).

phenomenon in international politics easily finds a logical justification in the Muslim societies within the context envisioned by Huntington's Clash of Civilizations (CoC) thesis; especially if/when the CoC concept is presented as a new global Western strategy against the Islamic world instead of a scientific/intuitive study.³⁶

Conclusion

The time has come for us to ignore antique, medieval and religious stereotypes. The 21st century, an age of science and technology, is indeed no setting for prolonging the clash of civilizations which has been going on for 1,400 years or so.

Although faced by challenges and disappointments, Turkish civilization and society has succeeded in transforming traditional structures and becoming a part of the modern community. Today Turkey is a prime model for other Islamic countries in terms of how to become modern without becoming essentially western. Obviously, the West, as the champion of universal values and human rights, should have the initiative in abolishing biased policies and supporting the Turkish transformation.

Unfortunately, the threat of further conflict seems to reside in the heart of Europe. Using every possible opportunity to keep Turkey out of the European Union, Europe is sending a silent but oft-cited message to the ears of the Islamic community: "We (Europeans) refuse to embrace a Muslim society no matter how modernized they are." This attitude raises several questions: Has the West really absorbed the values she champions? What happened to the major principles of the Enlightenment like secularization and rationalization? Does West envisage a secular or a religious world? Do they believe in a rational mentality or still choose follow the words of clergy?

The similarity of mediaeval and contemporary Western views and their potential of reinforcing serious polarization in the future is the most important threat to world peace. Radical Islamists will clearly take advantage of such unfriendly attitude. Constantly facing negative approaches, modern Turks on the other hand will surely be frustrated and feel lonely.

Turkish modernism and democracy may be considered imperfect and far below European standards by some Western politicians, but let's do not forget that we all have deficiencies. Today, modern Turks would hardly debate the quality of Western democracies or justice. If our intention were to criticize, then we could easily start critiquing the contemporary Europe as when Greece suppresses the political rights of Muslim minorities, the Sabanci assassins are set free in Belgium, the United Kingdom censors the Northern Irish news, German neo-Nazi's set fire to Muslim houses, the French ban veils, the Swiss ban the building of minarets and Danish cartoonists caricatures the prophet Muhammad. Such events could occur anywhere on the planet, regardless of how advanced a given society or democracy is.

³⁶ Mustafa Aydın and Çınar Özen, "Civilizational futures: Clashes or alternative visions in the age of globalization?" *Futures*, 42, (2010), p.547

Turkey and the other Turkic republics of Eurasia are prosperous states in their own right and determined to be a part of the modern world. The West should not waste this opportunity to create a better, peaceful, multicultural world. The prescription is simple: break the stereotype and follow the footsteps of rationalism.

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