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PRE-ISLAMIC RELIGIONS IN CENTRAL ASIA AND THEIR INFLUENCE ON SOCIAL AND POLITICAL LIFE

Abstract: *On the eve of the introduction of Islam, Central Asia was a region where the assimilation of different peoples and cultures was active, and various religions and doctrines were deeply rooted in the region. These beliefs have had a significant impact on the socio-political life of society.*

The article describes the ancient pre-Islamic religions and governing system of Central Asia on the basis of primary sources and scientific literature.

Key words: zoroastrianism, buddhism, nestorianism, Central Asia, Ahamonids, Great Silk Road, Western Turkic Khanate, Black Budun.

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Introduction

In the VI-VII centuries, the peoples living in the territory of the Turkic Khanate were influenced by various religious ideas. Almost every clan or tribe and people had their own religion. Therefore, many religions are widespread in Turkic tribes.

Animism and shamanism existed in Central Asia even during the Turkic khanate. Also, the worship of the spirits of ancestors remained a widespread religious idea among the Turkic peoples until the 10th century. This belief is based on the belief that the soul does not die, it lives in the afterlife. Such imaginations caused unusual practices in the life of ancient Turks. For example, in 576, at the funeral of Istami Khagan, his son sacrificed the horses that his father was riding, along with four prisoners of war, to his soul. Some sources also provide doubtful information that does not correspond to the reality of that time. One of them is related to the death of Muqan Khaqan. It is reported that after the death of Muqan Khaqan, 20,000 people

were sacrificed and buried together to serve him on the "abandoned day"¹ [8:105].

During this period, the majority of the inhabitants of Khakhan were in the belief of godliness - related to the blue sky, the age-old - Ashina period. In addition, the Turks understood the common belief in the creator in the theism, Zoroastrianism and Buddhism. In the "Monument of Bugut" as well as in the inscriptions of Urhun, it is emphasized that the Khagan is a mediator between God and the people. Because the common religious faith of the Turks united them in a union of tribes within twenty years (535-555) and allowed them to form a powerful state. In the 70s of the 6th century, the introduction of religions such as Zoroastrianism and Buddhism into the lives of the peoples of the Turkish khanate and their place in their lives was nothing but religious and national tolerance[7:53].

In addition to the above-mentioned beliefs, religious doctrines such as Zoroastrianism, Buddhism,

¹ "Abandoned Day" - Turks called the Day of Judgment "Abandoned Day". Turks placed stone statues of people next to their

gravestones. They are called "balbals". Balbals are memorials dedicated to the soul of a dead person.

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Monism, Mazdakism, and Tangriism, as well as Nestorianism, were widespread among Turkic peoples in the VI-VII centuries[15:153].

During this period, Zoroastrianism was especially widespread in Central Asia, and it was distinguished from Zoroastrianism practiced in Sassanid Iran. In Iran, Zoroastrianism developed as an official state religion, based on strict requirements. In Central Asia, it was followed due to religious tolerance[7:50].

Zoroastrianism, which arose in ancient Khorezm, became the state religion in the kingdoms of the Achaemenids, Africans and Sassanids. These empires ruled over a large part of the Near and Middle East for almost thirteen centuries from the 6th century BC to the 7th century AD[5:64]. Since Zoroastrianism, which has been practiced as the state religion for many years, is deeply rooted in the social and cultural life of the society, as well as in the state administration system, it was not easy for local peoples to abandon their religion after the introduction of Islam.

Iso Jabbarov gives detailed information about the Zoroastrian religion in the "Patron Saints and Goddesses of the Ancient Khorezmshahs" section of the book "The State of the Great Khorezmshahs" and cites the following opinion of the famous theologian Mary Boyce; "The government of Iran (also of ancient Khorezm - I.J) brought great prestige to Zoroastrianism, and some of the most important aspects of its teachings were adopted by Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and Gnostic sects. In the East, Zoroastrianism influenced the development of the northern variant of Buddhism" [5:64]. Of course, Mary Boyce may have made this point based on her years of research. But the above-mentioned religions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam are heavenly religions, and the books revealed to them confirm each other's information. In addition, the religion of Judaism was established in Egypt during the reign of Ramses II in the 13th century BC, that is, long before Zoroastrianism lived (according to Zoroastrian tradition, his life period corresponds to the end of the 7th century and the beginning of the 6th century BC)[16:903]. Also, in both Christianity and Islam, there are absolutely no rituals similar to fire worship or customs such as drying the dead in the sun, sometimes feeding the dead to dogs, and then burying the bones in special containers (ostadon). Abu Rayhan Beruni in his work "Asor ul-Baqiyya" ("Memorials left by ancient peoples") calls Zoroaster a "kazzab", that is, a false prophet [2:238].

Nevertheless, Zoroastrianism had a great influence on the social life of the society and for many years was at the level of the state religion.

Zoroastrianism developed differently in different regions. Zoroastrians of Iran and Zoroastrians of Central Asia had unique differences in their beliefs.

In the VII-VIII centuries, the majority of the population worshiped the Central Asian type of Zoroastrianism. An example of this is the following information. One of the Chinese sources mentions about 200 families living around Samarkand and how they buried their dead people: they build a fence in a large place, lock dogs in it, and carry the corpses of dead people into this fence, then collect their bones and bury them in the ground[24:6736].

These customs are similar to those of the fire-worshippers who lived much earlier, recorded by Strabo and Justin: according to them, the above ceremony is a Zoroastrian funeral, with the difference that the bones of Zoroastrians are buried in a special clay coffin - an ossuary. were [10:182].

Al-Mas'udi writes about Kason, which was the capital of Fergana before Islam, that there was a temple named Kovuson², built by a king named Kovus, and its building had a strange appearance. In it, people prayed to the sun and the heavenly bodies, and a sacred fire burned continuously in a special hearth inside the building[3:249].

Another religion spread in the region was Buddhism. From the time of the Kushans, Buddhism began to spread widely in the southern regions of Central Asia, mainly in cities, among merchants. Before the Turkish khanate, Central Asia (Bactria and Parthia) served as a transit area for the spread of Buddhism to China. One of the areas where Buddhism was widespread was Eastern Turkestan. According to Chinese sources, 5358 monasteries and 126100 monks were registered there in 713[7:52].

In the pre-Islamic period, there was a Buddhist temple in the city of Quwa consisting of two buildings with separate doors. At the entrance to the temple is a huge statue of horses and bearded goddesses with a human skull on its forehead[23:885]. Colorful clay figurines of the deities of the Buddhist pantheon were also found in the temple buildings. Also, according to Chinese sources, there was a temple in the 7th century in the city of Kushonia (near Kattakorgan), where the mayor of the city held some kind of ceremonies every day early in the morning; "The paintings of Chinese emperors on the wall on the north side of this building, the Iranian and Roman emperors on the western wall, and the Turkish and Indian governors on the eastern wall" [10:185]. Such information indicates that visual art and sculpture are very widely developed in Central Asia[27:132].

Muqan (553-572) Khagan's brother Tagpar (572-581) adopted Buddhism and sponsored the

² Kovuson is a fire-worshipping temple in the city of Koson, Ferghana Valley, which existed in the early Middle Ages. This

temple was destroyed during the reign of Caliph al-Mu'tasim (reigned 218-227/833-842).

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construction of monasteries and the translation of Buddhist canonical works [11:333].

In the 30s of the 7th century, Xuan Jiang³ saw two empty Buddhist temples in Samarkand. However, at the beginning of the 7th century, Buddhism declined in Sogd, but it was found that there are still Buddhist monuments in other regions - Ferghana and Toharistan [10:182].

Before the Arabs, the Nestorian religion was also spread in Central Asia. Nestorianism spread to Samarkand, Bukhara and Choch between 412-720, and religious institutions such as bishoprics and metropolitans were established. In addition to propagating their religion, Christians also took an active part in state affairs as doctors, scientists, and businessmen in the palaces of rulers. Only the Arab conquest put an end to this tradition[7:55].

In the 6th century, Nestorianism continued to spread in Central Asia, albeit slowly and haphazardly. Feophylact Simokatta⁴ and Feofan Byzantium⁵ have preserved very interesting information that some Turks in Bahrom Chubin's army had idol marks on their foreheads. Mothers drew such signs on their children's foreheads when they were young in order to protect them from diseases [10:182].

At first, Christian propaganda in the Turkish khanate had little effect. The Turks raised their worldview to the level of the state principle, but later the collapse of the Khaganate, the despair of the war ideology among the survivors of the massacre, reached the hands of Christian propagandists [4:271].

According to the information given by Ibn Havqal: "There is a temple where Christians gather in the village of Ash-Shavdar belonging to Camarqand, where they have their rooms, beautiful and neat houses.

I met some Christians from al-Iraq there. They chose this land because of its convenient location, and moved here because of its isolation and healthy climate. The temple is a waqf land, and some people have devoted themselves entirely to this work[26:71]. This land is located much higher than the other lands of al-Sughd and is called Vazkarda⁶[6:62]. According to the information provided by Ibn Havqal, we can see that the Nestorian religion did not lose its importance in some regions even during the Samanid period from Movarounnahr[14:125].

Descendants of the Christian Steppe Turks survived until the 13th century among the Qarluq and Basmil clans. Also later, Christianity appeared among the Uyghurs in the east.

The Mazdakian⁷ movement and ideology, which existed in the territory of Iran in the 5th - 6th centuries, spread widely to Central Asia. Residents involved in the Mazdak movement (kadvirs - landless dependent farmers) rebelled in Bukhara, attacked and destroyed the yards of large landowners, and seized land. They began to persecute themselves, that is, the landowners. In the 80s of the 6th century, the Mazdak movement reached its peak in Bukhara[25:880]. Abokhan⁸ (Abruy) skillfully used the uprising in Bukhara. With the help of the rebels, Abruy managed to establish his power by occupying the city of Poikand in 585. After seizing the power, he began to rule Bukhara harshly [9:142]. Peasants and rich people who suffered from Abrui's tyranny fled from Bukhara and built a city near Turkestan and Taroz⁹ and called it Hamukent, because the name of one big farmer who was the head of the group that fled from Bukhara was Hamuk. According to Narshahi's "History of Bukhara"; "Hamuk" means a gem in Bukhara, and "ket" means a city, that is, Hamuket means "Hamuk is a city of gems". In Bukhara, a big person is called "hamuk", that is, so-and-so is a gem [1:91].

Most of the rich and nobles fled from Bukhara, and the majority of those who remained in the city were the poor and destitute[17:30]. They sent men to their fugitive generals and asked him to rescue them from Abrui's tyranny. Then the commanders in Hamuket go to the presence of Karajurin (Korachorin), the king of the Turks, for help. The king sent his son Sheri Kishwar with a large army to Bukhara. When Sheri Kishwar arrived in Bukhara, he caught Abrui in Boykand and took him prisoner. Then, on his orders, a large sack was filled with gourd bees, and Abruy was put into that sack, and he died inside the sack. [12, p.315]. Sheri Kishwar built the city of Bukhara and built several villages. When the Chinese king's daughter was brought to Bukhara as a bride, they brought an idol from China among her equipment and installed it in Romiton [1:92]. The above data show that initially Central Asia served as a transit point for the spread of Buddhism to China, and later it returned to the region through the cultivation

³ Xuan Jiang (602-664) was a Buddhist monk, scientist, philosopher, traveler and translator who lived during the Tang Dynasty. Xuan Jiang was born in 602 to an intellectual family.

⁴ Theophylact Simocatta (580-630) was a Byzantine historian and writer who lived at the beginning of the 6th century.

⁵ Feofan Byzantium was a Byzantine historian who lived in the second half of the 6th century. Theophon's ten-book history describes the history of the Byzantine Empire from 562-581, mainly about the war with the Persians led by Emperor Justinian II.

⁶ Vazkarda – This village was on the site of Qingir village near Urgut.

⁷ Mazdakism is a religious and philosophical doctrine. Its founder, Mazdak (470-529), led the struggle of the people against the

Zoroastrian priests and nobles. According to the teachings of Mazdak, the processes in the universe consist of a struggle between the conscious and purposeful goodness, the source of light, and the blind and random source of darkness (ignorance). This struggle will end with the inevitable victory of "good" over "evil". Mazdakism is essentially one of the stages in the evolution of the Zoroastrian religion.

⁸ Abruy was the son of Turkic king Mooho. After his father's death, along with other princes, he claimed his father's throne. After his struggle for the throne was unsuccessful, he fled to the oasis of Bukhara with his loyal people. Shaniozov K. The formation process of the Uzbek people. p. 142

⁹ Taroz - present-day Jambul (Kazakhstan)

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of Buddhism, took deep roots and occupied a large place in the social life of the society [13, p. 202].

Monism occupies a special place among the religions that exist in Central Asia. The founder of this doctrine was Moni, who lived in Iran in the 3rd century. Moni knew the sects of Paganism, Christianity and Sanawiyyah (doubters). He is one of the people who claimed prophethood. About this, Abu Rayhan Beruni gives the following information in his work "Osor ul-Baqiyya": "Moni wrote at the beginning of his book called "Shapuraqan" to Shafur ibn Ardashir¹⁰: "Wisdom and good deeds are always those that the messengers (of God) bring from time to time. At one time it (wisdom and good deeds) was sent to the land of India through an ambassador named Buddha, at one time to the land of Iran through Zarathustra, and at another time to the Maghreb countries through Jesus[20:85]. Then, in this last century, this revelation was revealed to Moni, the messenger of the true God, and this prophet was sent (through me) to the land of Babylon[21:219]. It is also mentioned in the work that Moni, in his Bible composed using twenty-two letters, presented himself as the "Foracle" and "seal of the prophets" announced by Jesus Christ [2:241].

In his teachings, Moni forbade slaughtering and harming animals, harming fire, water, plants - in the clearest word. The pious and hermits of the Moni sect made laws that were obligatory for them[19:801]. According to the law, he is required to choose poverty, to turn away from lusts, to observe continuous fasting, to give alms as much as possible, to eat more than one day's food and one day's clothing, to abstain from sexual intercourse, to constantly travel around the world in order to lead the people[22:139]. Улар ўзларининг эргашувчиларига ўз мулкининг 1/10 ни садақа қилиш, умрининг еттидан бирида рўза тутиш, биргина хотин билан чекланиш, даъватчиларга ғамхўрилиқ каби бошқа расм-русумларни фарз қиладилар[2:242].

When the people of Central Asia converted to Islam, the Monites influenced the Shia and Islamic

sects[7:58]. According to Beruni, the Monites mostly sought refuge in countries far from the influence of Islam.

In the 7th and 8th centuries, the whole of Asia became a region where different religions spread. Islam spread in the west, Buddhism in the east, and Nestorianism and Monism, which were pushed out of the territory of Iran, in the north.

At the beginning of the 7th century, Central Asia rose economically and culturally, agriculture, crafts and trade developed very quickly[18:8]. Although the peoples of the region believed in different religions, they lived peacefully among themselves. On the trade route from China to Byzantium, gold jewelry was made for the wives of merchants and farmers in cities such as Bukhara, Samarkand, Choch (Tashkent), Kashgar, Turfan. But all this prosperity was the result of the submission of Sogd to the Turkish khanate [4:111].

Conclusion

In conclusion, it should be noted that on the eve of the introduction of Islam to Central Asia, many religious beliefs and doctrines were widely spread in the region, and their place in the life of the society was quite high. Some teachings rose to the level of state religion and had a direct impact on social and political life. During this period, the territory of Central Asia was part of the Turkish khanate, but it was divided into about 15 small independent states. Therefore, there were different religious views in each region. For example, Zoroastrianism, which has been in practice for several centuries, was practiced in Khorezm, while Buddhism, which was introduced by merchants, was widespread in Sogd and Ferghana. In addition, the country also believes in such doctrines as Nestorianism, Orthodoxy, Monism, and Mazdakism. We can also learn that the above-mentioned beliefs have taken a deep place in the lives of the peoples of the country, after the Arabs conquered Central Asia and introduced Islam, it took almost a century and a half for all the local peoples to accept Islam.

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¹⁰ Shapur ibn Ardashir - shahanshah (king of kings) of Iran. He reigned approximately from 240/243 to 272/273. Son of Ardashir I

of the Sassanid dynasty. He continued to strengthen the state started by his father. He waged successful wars against the Romans.

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