

***Shamanism and Islam: Sufism, Healing Rituals and Spirits in the Muslim World***, edited by Thierry Zarcone and Angela Hobart (London & New York: I. B. Tauris in association with Centro Incontri Umani, 2013), xli + 360 pp., ISBN: 978-1-84885-602-8, \$104.50 (hb)

This work must be considered a major work in studies not only of shamanism but also of certain contemporary Muslim cultures. While the term “shamanism” commonly refers to a wide range of practices in various Muslim and non-Muslim parts of the world, a catch-all category for many different cults and belief systems, a certain unity can however, be perceived between the shamanic practices of North Asia and Muslim Central Asia. Zarcone, Hobart, and others examine how shamanism, Islam, and especially Sufism have interrelated over the centuries, and are still interrelating today.

The book provides an in-depth exploration of “Islamised shamanism,” a survey of and a perspective on the contemporary reality of shamanism not only in Central Asia, but also in the Middle East, North Africa, and the Balkans. Muslim shamans, like their Siberian counterparts, cultivate relationships with spirits to “help” individuals through healing and divination. This work also credits two researchers, Basilov and Garrone for combining historical and anthropological approaches to understanding shamanism. The two authors brought a comparative analysis of Islamized shamanism and North Asian shamanism. They also express an interest in the mingling of shamanism with Sufism and specific healing rituals which developed in a Muslim context and the relations of shamans with the spirits.

Islam was introduced into Central Asia by Arabs and shamanism was considered a pagan religion, in its original form. Shamanism was reinterpreted through Islam, more precisely through Sufism or Islamic mysticism. Sufism was pivotal during the campaigns of Islamization in the region and Sufi sheikhs were the main propagators of Islam. Sufism had heterodox trends and shamans of the region were forced to Islamize its external appearance and its religious discourse. The heterodox Sufi trends pleased shamanism because of their flexibility, even sometimes with disrespect toward implementations of sharī‘a. Shamans borrowed many ideas and practices from Sufism and the

particular Sufi group, the Qalandariyya appeared making a hazy blend of shamanism and Sufism.

The actual “blending” or “syncretism” of shamanism and Sufism seems difficult to describe simply due to the variegation of examples. Nonetheless the editors state that the “amalgam” of shamanism and Sufism is based on a search for analogies and reinterpretation between aspects of shamanism and Sufism. The editors wonder as Patrick Garrone does in the present volume, whether Islamized shamanism constitutes a definitively established corpus of syncretic beliefs or if the ongoing confrontation between the two religious traditions of shamanism and Islam is an active process of mutual assimilation.

The syncretism of shamanism and Sufism continued over time and gave birth to manifold hybridisations of both traditions, differences depending on and being influenced by whether local Islamic influence was strong or soft and also where it happened. Healing and divination were mingled with Muslim devotion and rituals, these being more easily accepted by Muslim theologians. Diverse practices are linked to healing and foretelling amongst shamans.

Shamans are purported to be linked with a family of spirits. The healing process operated by the shaman is based essentially on a negotiation or fight with the spirits. These spirits or helper spirits fill a central position throughout the life of the shaman. The link can once again be seen between Sufism and shamanism with the deceased saints are seen as powerful spirits and auxiliaries of the shaman. It must also be noted that there is opposition of varying degrees to shamanism throughout the whole area by orthodox Islam and the more radical wing, Wāḥḥābism.

The chapters in the book are all based on original research and shed light on the current situation of shamanism in the whole of Central Asia including Turkey and the Balkans and in selected areas beyond. The various chapters in the book explore complexities of shamanic rituals, music, dance, and also poetry, epic and bardic. These are connections between shamanism and arts of the Muslim world. One chapter provides information for comparison about shamanism in Siberia. This shows the heterogeneous nature of “Islamised shamanism,” being sometimes close to the Northern Asian variety and sometimes closer to orthodox Islam. Garrone suggests that there is an “Islamised shamanism” and also a “shamanised Islam.” The full supplement of the chapters contained in the book demonstrate and show

the variety and variegation of shamanism throughout the Central Asian region, including Turkey, tracing from Kazakhstan through to the Uyghur part of the Xinjian province in China. The second part of the book explores examples of shamanism outside of Central Asia, which can be seen to show parallels and contrasts between these and the Central Asian shamanisms.

The work will probably be quite interesting for students of Islamic studies and of comparative religion. What can be seen is the outcome of encounter with pre-Islamic religion and later with shamanic heterodoxies within these Muslim cultures. The original research in the book begins to show how orthodox Islam encountered pre-Islamic religions, how these religions transformed and survived, and how Islam treats these transformed variants of shamanism within Sufism nowadays. For students of comparative religion, the question of how shamanism was a part of syncretism with Islam in different aspects should prove interesting. For example, the shamanistic invocative song can be compared with the Sufi repetitive litany (*dhikr*) and this can be compared with aspects of other religions. Major aspects of interest to students of comparative religions should also be the healing that is purportedly done by shamans as well as the relationships to spirits and saints. These aspects can also be compared with extant similarities in other religions.

This book must receive a very positive review as it is an important work for the study of contemporary shamanism in its contemporary cultural setting. This original research uses a methodology which is primarily anthropological yet is also providing some historical relevance for much of the material. In its analyses it is showing certain coherences amidst the variegation of the various shamanisms of the region. One can also see similarities and differences with shamanisms beyond the Central Asian region. The comparisons and analyses of shamanisms contained in the various chapters of the book make this work an important and relevant description of the state of contemporary shamanisms and their encounters with Islam and other religious and spiritual trends and forces. This importance and relevance can be seen if one asks the question, "What makes Central Asia different from other parts of the Muslim world?" This book should be useful for students of Central Asian culture and for students of Islam in the modern world generally. The work provides a window in on this aspect of local culture which can be assumed to have had a signifi-

cant impact on the overall local culture and identities historically, also continuing into their contemporary settings.

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