

Islamic Shamanism Among Central Asian Peoples

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The forms of Central Asian shamanism owe their relative homogeneity both to a commonly shared tradition and the influence of Islam.¹ It is, however, possible to distinguish two distinct tendencies, which correspond to the two ethnic groups that inhabit this region, one Iranian-speaking and the other Turkish-speaking. At the same time, the process of Islamization does not in itself prevent the preservation of certain elements of shamanism pertaining both to the thought and practice of these Muslim peoples, nor to their secondary, non-official religious activities. In addition, certain customs that were developed within Islam itself, such as Sufism and transvestism, are believed by some investigators to have points of contact with shamanism.²

The most commonly used words to name the shaman are derived³ from the original Turkish term *kam*. The duties shared by all contemporary Central Asian shamans include the identification of the causes of illness and their treatment, ritual cures of illness, divination, the search for people who have disappeared, and the discovery of lost or stolen animals and objects. The number of

1. This article is an excerpt from the doctoral dissertation (*Islamizirovannoe shamanstvo narodov Sredneyi Azii i Kazakhstana. Istoriko-etnograficheskoe issledovanie. Avtoreferat dissertatsii na soiskanie uchenoy stepeni doktora istoricheskikh nauk, Moskva 1991*) of V.N. Basilov. The excerpt was selected by Roberte Hamayon. The dissertation combines a critical examination of written sources on Central Asian shamanism with an analysis of ethnographic data obtained in the field (beginning in the mid-1960s in Turkmenia, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, with a brief sojourn to Kirghizia in 1989).

2. Iomudsky, Demidov, Sukhareva, Snesarev.

3. They are: *bakshi* and *bakhshi* (Uzbek, Tazhik, Kirghiz and Uygour), *baksy* (Caucasian), *folbin*, *folchi*, *palci* (Tazhik, Uzbek, Uygour), *parikhon* (Uygour, Tazhik, Uzbek), *porkhan* (Turkoman, Karakalpak), *parkhon* (Uzbek of Khorezem). The term *folbin-folchi* is formed on the basis of the arabic word *fal* "destiny"; *bakshi* is derived from Sanskrit, mediated by Buddhism, although there is no trace of it before the fourteenth century.

duties performed by the shaman has been diminishing as shamans are replaced by augurs and healers. In fact, the borders separating these diverse specialists is hard to define: both augurs and healers carry out animistic ceremonies; both use the same ritual objects as shamans and, like them, try to communicate with spirits. As for the shamans: they act as healers since they treat the sick, and some of them, in addition to ritual cures, employ rationally based folk medicines.

Shamans (like augurs and healers) can be of either sex. However, the distribution of the sexes varies according to the group. Among the Uzbek and Tazhik peoples, shamans tend to be female, while among the Caucasians, Turkomans, Kirghiz, Karakalpaks and Uygours they tend to be male. Generally speaking, it is the influence of Islam – which reduced the social scope of shamanism – that has led to the transfer of shamanistic activity to the feminine sphere. The idea of inheriting the shamanic “gift” has been preserved throughout Central Asia, although to varying degrees: among the until-recently seminomadic Caucasians, Kirghiz, Karakalpaks and Uzbeks, a firm law of inheritance is still in effect; among the long-sedentary Tazhiks, Turkomans, and Uygours it has ceased to be obligatory.

The daily life of most shamans is hardly distinguishable from their neighbors’. Even the bizarre side of the shaman’s behavior shocks no one; it is assumed to be caused by the demands of the spirits. Thus among the sedentary Tazhiks and Uzbeks (and to a lesser extent among the Kirghiz), there are many female shamans who live without a family; the popular explanation is that their guardian spirits forbid them from marrying, threatening to punish them – with discord and sickness in marriage, and with the death of babies – if they dare disobey. Some shamans avoid crowds – meetings, bazaars, etc. – and observe many dietary prohibitions; some abstain from salt and pepper, others avoid milk and fish, still others refuse to eat any food they themselves have not prepared, and will eat only with their own spoon and drink from their own cup. Most of these restrictions are a result of a concern for ritual purity. This explains why certain guardian spirits prohibit female shamans from attending funerals or memorial services, or insist on the wearing of white clothes so common among the Tazhik and Uzbek peoples (in some cases the shaman must wear them at all times, in others only during the ritual).

Some male shamans wear women’s clothes. This custom, which

has almost disappeared in our time, was most commonly observed in the oasis of Khorezem and in the valley of Fergana. The Hamburg Museum owns a Caucasian "magician's" costume that combines elements of both male and female dress. The wearing of female clothes is associated with the ritual "change of sex" or transvestism, which is known to have existed in Central Asia as early as the Scythian period. This ritual might be explained by the ancient belief, common in Central Asia, that the shaman's guardian spirit is itself feminine and desires to see herself embodied in the shaman, at least externally (this goes against the hypothesis advanced by L.Y. Sternberg and V.G. Bogoras, which is based on the idea, common in Siberia, of sexual relations between the male shaman and his guardian spirit).⁴ The idea that the shaman must bear a likeness to his guardian spirit probably dates back to deepest antiquity when, for the most part, shamanic spirits were conceived in the forms of animals.

Ritual activity is neither the sole nor even principle activity of shamans, since they earn their living in the same way as everyone else in the community. However, data on their economic condition are rare and contradictory. The idea of a shaman selling his services of healing or divination has been judged by some as unthinkable. Indeed traditional standards require that the shaman not aspire to profit, since his guardian spirit needs him to be disinterested. As to the social position of the shaman: observers have noted that it has varied over time, declining after the adoption of Islam, and particularly at the end of the nineteenth century. Although this decline was real, it did not prevent many shamans, male and female alike, from being greatly respected by the local population, even in the twentieth century.

Ritual accessories. As in many other shamanistic contexts, the primary ritual accessory is a musical instrument. It is to the sound of a

4. We feel obliged to point out that this hypothesis is not maintained by the author in the rest of his work, and that the data he offers point, on the contrary, to romantic, even explicitly sexual relations (see below) between the shaman and his guardian spirit, conceived as a member of the opposite sex – in accordance with Sternberg's hypothesis. In another article (1978) the author shows how the shaman's wearing of women's clothes during the ritual in no way implies his feminization outside the ritual. A comparative analysis suggests that the idea of a romantic relation between this world and the next is a constant; what changes is the manner of apportionment of sexual roles. If the supernatural partner is thought to be masculine, then the human partner should be feminine – either a woman or a man dressed as a woman, which seems to be the case in the "agricultural variant" that the author detects (note of Roberte Hamayon).

drum beat that Uzbek, Tazhik and Uygour shamans summon their guardian-spirits – a drum without handle or drumstick, which points to a type of Middle Eastern drum known in the region for more than two thousand years. The Uzbek drum, of Kipchakan origin, is decorated with a sketch drawn in the blood of a sacrificial animal; the membrane of the drum is pierced with small holes to receive the spirits, which the shaman “gathers” inside the drum during the ritual and then “pours” over the sick person. Some female shamans attach amulets to their drums. Generally speaking, the drum to this day occasions a feeling of respect from the people. The musical instrument of the Caucasians and Karakalpakans is called a *kobyz*, a type of two-stringed hurdy-gurdy played with an ancient bow,⁵ whose origin legend attributes to Korkut-atta, the first shaman and singer. Caucasian shamans hang various pendants from their hurdy-gurdys, such as amulets and bells, and claim that their instruments can outrace the fieriest steed – a belief that coincides with a widely held Siberian belief that the shaman’s drum is a magical animal mount. Some shamans prefer to use (more and more as shamanistic traditions have diminished) the *dombra*, a tightly stringed instrument also popular among the Kirghiz shamans of the north. Among the Turkomans, instruments whose strings are pinched (*dutar*) and strummed (*gydzhak*) co-exist; among the Uygours the instruments are sometimes played together, creating quasi-orchestral forms. However, the actual relation between string instrument and drum is unclear.

The shaman uses a whip to chase away spirits that have done injury to the sufferer. This in fact is a secondary attribute of the whip, resulting from the belief in the drum as an animal mount – which explains the Altaian usage of calling the drumstick itself a whip. However, in the twentieth century, the whip has become the primary ritual tool for many Caucasian, Uzbek, and Tazhik shamans. As to the cane, which was formerly used by shamans and hung with various metallic, ruby and pearl pendants: by the end of the nineteenth century it was no longer in use among shamans, only by dervishes. Various metallic arms – knife, saber, sword – are also among the shaman’s paraphernalia of secondary importance, although in our day the knife has become, for some shamans, the only ritual object.

5. It goes back to the “Scythian harp” found by Rudenko in the second tumulus of Pazyryk (fifth century B.C.).

The use of tree branches in shamanic practice has been attested to from the period of high antiquity. The shaman uses the branch to touch the patient, but it also carries the symbolic meaning of the "tree of life." The Uygours represent this by means of a string of *tug*, which is stretched from ceiling to floor at the ritual site; a branch of multi-colored ribbons is then attached at the upper end of the string, which is where the spirits chased from the sufferer are believed to gather. A strip of white fabric is used by the Turkomans, while the Uzbeks of Khorezem employ pieces of white cloth for masculine spirits and red for feminine.

The use of a mirror and a bowl of water accompany certain rituals (especially divination), as well as, under the influence of Islam, the use of beads and prayer books – which however are not read and often not even opened.

To carry out the ritual, the shaman usually sets up a small altar on which his accessories and food for the spirits are placed. To this day there is a custom, in the valley of the Fergana, of reserving a special area, in a state of ritual purity, for the use of those spirits believed to be tied to the destiny of the shaman's family and capable of stimulating one of its female members toward the role of shaman.

The "shamanic illness." Tylor (1871) was one of the first authors to charge that the shaman was a bearer of a neurotic heritage (hysteria, epilepsy, and other diseases), and many Russian researchers (Potanin, Mikhailovsky, Kharuzin, Anoxin, Kagarov, Ksenofontov and others) were quick to follow suit. Some of them (Alekseyev, Weinstein, Mikhailov, Semichov) continue to support this contention, even though it has for a long time, and correctly, been impugned.

Rather than rehashing here the arguments that refute this interpretation, let us instead bring to bear data gathered in Central Asia. There, as in many other places, it is deemed an illness to be a carrier of those spirits released by shamanic activity. Indeed the illness is thought to be obligatory. Uzbeks and Kirghizans see in it a sign of spiritual favor. Even if it is already obvious to all, the seer or shaman is called upon to establish the correct diagnosis. The illness, it is believed, is caused by the fact that the spirits must carry the future shaman to the nether world, must conceal him there (often in the branches of the "tree of life"), nourishing and warming him, with the aim of "recreating" the chosen one. They cut his

body into pieces and cook it so they can eat the flesh; then they forge together certain organs of the body before resuscitating him: He is no longer an ordinary human being. The idea of an amorous relation between the shaman and his guardian spirit is also present, but seems to arise later. The "re-creation" of the shaman, which generally begins in adolescence, lasts several years. In this sense it can be compared to an initiatory rite of coming of age, while simultaneously being comparable by its function to a consecratory rite.

Take, for example, the case reported by Radlov (1893) of the Uzbek shaman woman Ochil, from the Samarkand region. Her guardian spirit, he reports, is a saintly old man who ordered her to become a shaman to "defend people." Her behavior is the source of numerous scandals; she even throws her own son – an infant – from the roof of her house. Her husband binds her by the arms and legs and locks her in her room. Her guardian spirit, using the chimney to free her, leads her into the surrounding mountains where he continues her education; he tells her about times past, teaches her about the current state of the country and about shamanic practices: "Entreat for this life and the next: entreat for the people; entreat for happiness, longevity, prosperity, and procreation." This account attests to an education received in dreams – and dreams play an important role not only in shamanic practice but in access to shamanic knowledge. Indeed in Central Asia there is no tradition of one of the chosen receiving his teachings from an already experienced shaman (the little evidence in this direction is of doubtful veracity) – this of course does not prevent the aspirant from making inquiries. Everything depends on his ability to embrace his role.

The idea of suffering is an essential component of chosenness. It is not a question of mental or even personal suffering: the illness of a child is a frequent catalyst for the assuming of shamanic duties by Uzbek women. The variety of observed forms well illustrates that the "illness" is neither a result of an organic change or of psychic deviance but rather of cultural traditions. The fact that the majority sex varies from culture to culture also tends to prove the point: The fact that Uzbek and Caucasian shamans are usually men in no way implies that the women of these societies are exempt from "hereditary psychic deficiencies"! Inversely, the feminization of shamanic duties in Tazhik and Uzbek cultures in no way signifies an immunity for the men! Clearly the reasons depend on socio-

logical factors as well as to the degree of penetration by Islam among the respective groups.

Shamanic ritual. From the very first observations (at the end of the eighteenth century), the same thing is reported: the shamanic séance has a clear meaning to its participants. It represents the voyage of the shaman to other worlds in search of the sufferer's soul, or else a visit to a spirit from whom one expects help or, more often, evil; in this case it is hoped that the spirit will renounce his design. By the jests and chants of the shaman, everyone understands where he is, what he sees, and what he is doing. The only thing that varies is the aim of a séance, which changes according to the nature of the spirits whom the shaman encounters.

A century later this realistic conception of the shaman's action began to be confused and was finally expunged under Islamic influence. Islam's aim was to eradicate everything that contradicted it: since for Islam the heavens were inaccessible to man, all the worlds to which the shaman traveled were also inaccessible; henceforth only spirits could travel, and the sole purpose was to bring the hostile spirit back to the *yourte*, where the shaman presided. The intensity and extent of shamanic activity was thus reduced, and its meaning altered: there were now many stereotypical images that lacked any basis for explanation. The most complicated ritual became the curing of an illness. The first step was diagnosis, which necessitated a predetermined ritual. Next, the spirits responsible for the illness had to be expelled; the shaman would simultaneously threaten and cajole them, using the sacrifice of a mammal (or a bird) to take the place of the sufferer, according to the formula "blood for blood, soul for soul"; the color of the hair (or the feathers) of the victim would indicate the category to which the destinator spirit belonged.

Contemporary data allow us to identify two major tendencies, the characteristics of which are enumerated below. Clearly there can be no fixed division between the two; in many regions the rituals are mixed, while in other regions people take part in both.

The Turkish or "Pastoral" variant. The shamans are for the most part men. The séance involves the playing of a stringed instrument, *kobyz* or *dombra* with Caucasians, *dutar* with the Turkomans, *kobyz* with the Karakalpaks, *komuz* with the Kirghiz. The curing of the sickness usually begins at nightfall. The divinatory tool can be a

musical instrument (Caucasian), forty-one goat droppings or stones (Kumalak, Caucasian, Turkoman, Uzbek), or the shoulder blade of a sheep (Caucasian, Uzbek, Turkoman, Kirghiz). The type of offering to the spirits is usually the sacrifice of an animal, on which the participants feast, since only the smell is accessible to the spirits. During the séance the shaman magically circles the room, showing that he is free of material bonds when in the presence of his guardian spirit; he leaps barefoot onto the sharpened tips of saber blades; walks on the cutting edge of a knife or actually stabs himself with it; he takes and licks red-hot objects, and madly bangs his head; then he soars upward on a rope attached to the cupola-shaped opening of the *yourte*. At the moment of the cure, he grabs the lungs of the sacrificed animal and strikes the sufferer with them, then hurls the lungs through the opening of the *yourte*; sometimes he transfers the spirits responsible for the illness from the body of the sufferer to the skull of a horse or dog.

The Tazhik or "agricultural" variant. Here the shamans are mostly female (Tazhik, Uzbek). The séance involves the playing of a drum. The séance most often takes place in the daytime. The principle divinatory instrument is the drum, but a mirror and a bowl of water, into which wads of cotton have been dropped, are also used. The offerings to the spirits are usually made of flour or of dishes with a flour base; animals are also sacrificed, sometimes small, horned livestock but especially chickens. Magical circlings around the room are not part of these rituals. The cure involves the use of willow branches, which are used, by means of soft blows, to expel the guilty spirit from the sufferer's body (Uzbek, Uygour); at the end of the séance the shaman often points to an object – supposedly discovered by the guardian spirit – that is identified as the source of the illness (Uzbek, Turkomans of the oasis of Khorezem). To effect the cure, the shaman covers the head or upper part of the body of the sufferer with cloth, usually white (Uzbek, Tazhik, Uygour, southern Kirghiz); he applies an unction or spray to the sufferer, made with the blood of the sacrificed animal (Uzbek, Tazhik, Turkomans of Khorezem); he ties string knots to deprive the evil spirits of their power to harm (Tazhik, Uzbek). The shaman, whether man or woman, is believed – the image of it is clear in this case, while in the Turkish variant it has been stricken – to be having sexual relations with his guardian spirit of the opposite sex (Tazhik, Uzbek).

The question of the shamanic personality and the trance. Comparative data allow us to assert that shamanism results from a society's needs and not from the psychic qualities of any particular group of individuals. Of course, the choice of candidates is limited by the demands of the shaman's role: one must know how to sing and play music, have excellent body control and acute sensory organs as well as manual dexterity; however, even when certain of his own abilities, the shaman will not put them to use unless he is assured of the support of his guardian spirits. Indeed the trance borders on a state of rage (the shoulders shaking and the entire body shuddering as if in paroxysms of fever) and ends in a kind of faint. Yet the shaman remains in control of himself even in this state: rage and fainting are behaviors demanded by the traditions of the ritual; to the extent that it is believed the spirits demand it, they are logical outgrowths of the goal being sought. The shaman fails in his duty if he exhibits this behavior outside of the séance or if, during the séance, he loses control of himself and therefore loses contact with his audience. Finally, the shaman must of course mobilize all his resources to carry out the ritual, and certain factors and techniques can be of help to him; however, they can never replace his essential skill, which is his power of concentration; indeed in Central Asia no hallucinogens are used. In addition, although Islam has replaced musical instruments with beads and prayer books, the practice of shamanism has continued. Yet the change has not been easy for everyone, which explains in part why certain elements of the ritual – its music, smells, objects, etc. – unleash a kind of Pavlovian reflex; it also explains why not everyone manages to reach the degree of control necessary to remain abstracted from the ritual.

There is another aspect of the ritual that researchers have habitually neglected: it is the fact that this state has not been reserved exclusively for the shaman; during the séance in which the cure is effected, several participants also exhibit it, in particular the sufferer. Nor is it a state ignored by Islamic mysticism, as the collective trance of Sufism demonstrates. In both cases it is a question of ritual behavior determined by cultural traditions. It is the same with the edict to the shaman "not to remember" what he did in the trance.

Invocations. The shaman's art is indissociable from the musician's, the singer's, the storyteller's and the poet's art; its ter-

minology expresses it and its faith underlines it. Uzbeks believe that the singer's talent is a gift of the same spirits that protect the shaman. As to the person of Kirghiz, he is believed to have become the bard of the epic poem *Manas* after Manas himself appeared to him in a dream and demanded that he sing of his exploits; ever since, bards have been deemed to have the ability to heal, which is a result of the magic power attributed to the performance of the epic itself. Needless to say, the links between shamanism and epic among the Turkic peoples have been widely commented upon (Radlov, Chadwick and Zhurminsky) but there is always room for new examples. Besides, the influence works both ways; shamanic formulas, subjects and images can be found in epic narratives, and vice versa.

Our materials show that it is not quite correct to say, as Eliade did in regard to the North American Indians, that the shaman improvises his songs and forgets them once the séance is completed. In Central Asia the shaman relies on a traditional, unitary structure: each song begins with an invocation of the spirits and ends with the shaman accompanying the spirits back home; stereotypes abound, modified according to the situation. To determine the variability of the texts, we taped the invocations of a particular shaman, a woman, over a five-year period and under various conditions. The tapes show that the song was neither ever exactly the same nor completely different from one performance to the next; rather it varied according to circumstance and the inspiration of the moment. The song was full of additions and subtractions without, however, altering the general design; there were even variations between what a shaman had just taped and what she repeated, as she heard the tape, in the process of transcription.

The spirits. For the most part, shamanism's traditional concepts have been eliminated by Islam, which itself is indifferent to cosmological speculation. To the extent that it has inherited the Arab *djinn*s, Islam does sanction some form of belief in spirits. In the Koran the spirits are divided into two categories, Muslim and Infidel, and man is allowed to call on them for help. This eased Islam's assimilation of shamanism, and many elements of shamanism remain: spirits are still represented in the form of dolls, can be offered food and drink and can enter into amorous relations; it is still believed that a spirit can "strike" a man, can "touch" or "crush" or "be united" with him. These ideas, however, are rather confused.

Sukhareva classifies Tazhik spirits into three categories: those who protect people, those who are by nature hostile to people, and those who enter into amorous relations with people, the *pari*. This classification seems inadequate. First of all, the third category appears to be a modality of the first. Furthermore, even “good” spirits can be of harm to the person they protect. For example, the shaman’s guardian spirit can demand the blood of animal sacrifice from him; this is why, say the Uzbeks, people are “struck” by harmful spirits. As to the *pari-peri*, they are mythical beings of ancient Iranian derivation; although harmful according to the Zoroastrian conception elucidated in the *Avesta*, they were once benevolent and remained so into our time. It is the same with the *dev*, who also derive from Iranian mythology⁶; in Zoroastrianism they are conceived of as nefarious but in the popular imagination are believed to be benevolent: the shaman’s protector is often a “white *dev*.”

Unlike the *momo-mama* (feminine spirits who officiate at the birth of children and whose cult is essentially limited to the Tazhiks of the plain), the *albasty* are known from the Great Wall of China to the shores of the Mediterranean Sea: they too are feminine spirits, conceived as having light-colored (“yellow”) hair and elongated breasts thrown back over their shoulders and down the back. *Albasty* are believed to enter into amorous relations with men, an echo of their ancient role as mistresses of wild animals. An *albasty* has the power to harm infants and women who are giving birth. This is why the shaman stalks her. She is also endowed with the ability to become the shaman’s guardian spirit; once submissive she will allow the shaman to heal the women that she has harmed. More fundamentally, the *albasty* is linked to the shaman’s ability to assume his role: It is believed that the aspirant must meet her and pull out one of her hairs (or a tuft of hair) before he can proceed to the ritual that will confirm him as shaman. “If,” say the Uzbeks, “a yellow woman (an *albasty*) touches a man, he will become a true shaman”; and she will be his guardian spirit.

The *chiltan* (‘forty men’ in Persian) are masculine spirits known to both Iranian and Turkic-speaking peoples. They are middle-aged or elderly saints who deliver people from misfortune and bring them happiness; they are guardians of dervishes and of mar-

6. This word is derived from the word that signifies “God” in a number of Indo-European languages.

riage and birth; of the youth of young men and of success at fishing. In general, tradition ties them to orgiastic cults of antiquity. According to Uygourian legend, they are the source of shamanism and protect shamans; for the Uzbeks, they are hereditary guardian spirits. The manner in which they are represented wavers: in principle masculine, they are also imagined in the form of young girls or divided into masculine and feminine elements. Thus, in the valley of Fergana, twenty young men and twenty young woman, all of slight build, march in a procession – while playing the drum – to receive an offering of food. In Zervashan rites horsemen accompany the *pari*. One can see how mixed the various schema are. In all probability, Islam wanted to make saints out of the *chiltan*, endowing them with great powers and suppressing all feminine features; but shamanistic rites have managed to retain a taste for the pleasures of feminine company.

On the whole, however indistinct the categories of spirits might be, there is not a single one that can be seen as belonging exclusively to the shaman (even in the case where the spirit that “touches” the shaman becomes his guardian spirit). They all belong to a vein of the popular imagination, in spite of the effort of Islam to create a category specifically related to the guardians of shamans. Indeed all spirits can be both benevolent and malevolent, in spite of the attempt to divide the spirits into “good” (Muslim) or “bad” (Infidel).

Shamanism as a component of popular Islam. In principle Islam likens shamanism to sorcery and thus condemns it; however, by acknowledging the intervention of the *djinn*s in the lives of people, Islam opens the door to a positive understanding of shamanic practices. At the time of the penetration of Islam, shamans were hounded until they agreed to abandon their most “pagan” claims. Traces of this impossible amalgam and of professional competition persisted into the nineteenth century. By the turn of the twentieth century, however, coexistence had become a reality, even if it was not a matter of real cooperation: shamans would send the sick to consult mullahs, and vice versa. Some highly placed Muslims, who confessed to being possessed by evil spirits, attempted to hold rituals of divination and cure in the shamanic manner. As to the shamans themselves (who were generally respected): they would often begin their rituals with Muslim prayers and would request Allah’s help in their invocations; in daily life they might even be

exemplary Muslims, as their spirits demanded of them both disinterest and ritual purity.

From this period forward, Islamic saints more and more often acted as guardian spirits of the shaman; worshipping them became part of shamanic practice – for example, a shaman might advise a sick person to spend a night at the site of worship of a local saint so as to facilitate a cure. Sufism too was widely diffused in the shamanic milieu, although in a simplified form as compared with Islamic mysticism and, as importantly, was saturated with shamanic elements; the dervish makes use of a stick adorned with a cow's bell, heals the sick by means of expulsion, is a diviner, stretches out on the ground as if in a faint and then regains consciousness; confused with the shaman, he is often believed to have an hereditary guardian spirit. Inversely, sometimes it happens that a shaman must be consecrated by the Sufi *ishan* in order to assume his role of shaman; as to the collective trance *zikr*, it is widespread in shamanic practice. Thus shamanism, which had gone through a period of decline in the preceding decades, is today experiencing – amidst the general revival of religion worldwide – a great renewal, particularly because of its therapeutic aspect.

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